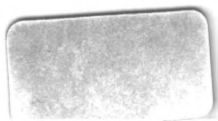


All the year round

Charles Dickens



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All

"The Story of our Lives from Year to Year."—SHAKESPEARE.

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

A Weekly Journal.

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

v. 76

THIRD SERIES.

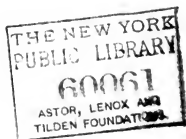
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No. 314.—THIRD SERIES. SATURDAY, JANUARY 5, 1895. PRICE TWOPENCE.

PRISONERS OF SILENCE.

By MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

Author of "A Fallant Ignorance," "A Mere Cypher,"
"Cross Currents," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE softly falling dusk of the August evening was stealing slowly on, filling the room with shadows; the soft night wind floated in at the open window, stirring the curtains and draperies; it was nearly eight o'clock, and still Lady Karslake did not ring for lights—did not even move. She was lying back in a big chair by the window, a rather ghostly-looking figure in a soft white gown; her hands were clasped above her head; her eyes were fixed upon the evening sky, and in their depths there was a light as of intense life, which contrasted sharply with the serene blue, growing more tranquil moment by moment, on which they rested.

To go through life with no sense of its riddle is given only to the very callous and the very dull of fibre. The degree to which man is distressed and rendered restless by its unsolved presence—when once that presence is recognised—is determined by the greater or less predominance in the individual of that mysterious quality which we call "soul," "spirit," "spiritual affinity," each according to our particular formula. Into Eve Karslake's life the sense of that riddle had penetrated, quietly, insidiously, along the most commonplace lines of a perfectly smooth and easy existence. Her husband's death had made no terrible gash in her life, but it had altered her position. It gave her absolute independence. Perhaps to her sensitive and essentially womanly nature independence itself brought with it

a touch of loneliness; certainly it is not possible for any human being to pass on from one phase of existence to the other without a sense, more or less definite, more or less chilling, of the irretrievableness of time, of the inevitable progress of life, of the inevitable end. Lady Karslake was quite unconscious of any such thoughts; they would have struck her as rather humorous in connection with herself. But they were not without their effect upon her, nevertheless. In the year that followed her husband's death something of her zest of life died out. She learned to know the meaning of the words weariness and satiety. She had begun to ask questions and to get no answers. And the change in her expression was the material result.

It was not in her to accept the new factor in her life and to become in time oblivious of it. It made her restless and wretched. She dealt with it in many ways. She denied it; laughed at it; analysed it. She made sundry attempts to find the answer to it; notable among which was her late philanthropic experiment. But each attempt seemed only a greater failure than its predecessor, and left her, as she had told North Branston, in worse case than before.

And now the haunting riddle was swept out of her life. Not answered; the riddle of life is never wholly answered but by death; but obliterated. The whole condition of life was altered for her. She stood in the midst of a flood of light, that blinded her to the existence of everything but itself. All her faculties, quickened and stimulated as they had never been before, were absorbed in the source of their quickening to the exclusion of any other sense.

Love had come late to Eve Karslake. It had come unsought, unrecognised until it

burst suddenly into full bloom. The old interest in, and sympathy with, North Branston, of the Alnchester days, had stood as it were between her and any knowledge of her development. Their relations in London, had she ever thought about them—and she never did think about them, being by no means a woman of an introspective turn of mind—would have seemed to her merely their Alnchester relations developed as time had developed them both. North Branston had spoken; and, in the flood of realisation which his words let loose upon her, all that had been between them was merged for ever for her in that which was to be.

The supreme woman's impulse, awakened at last, throbbed for the first time in the very maturity of the woman's nature. It thrilled through the whole woman, informing every instinct, every characteristic with itself. It possessed her as only such a temperament can be possessed by love. Every thought, every impulse was concentrated in it. All her previous perceptions were absorbed in it. The pity and the sympathy which he had hitherto created in her were swamped and borne away as by a flood. They belonged to an imperfect state of things; they belonged to the old life of dissatisfaction and regret with which they passed into abeyance. A new heaven and a new earth seemed to have been created for her in which he and she were to dwell absolutely alone, absolutely satisfied in one another.

No woman's soul can pass through such a transformation lightly or tranquilly. To Eve Karslake, the two days which had followed on her realisation had been days of tumult not to be described. Every form of acute feeling possible to such a woman so situated had possessed her and shaken her. Doubt and distrust; distrust of herself; distrust of that other who was to be her world; a quivering dread of that great sea on the brink of which she stood; a burning something too intense for joy, too exquisite for fear; all these ran high in her, and had their way.

Then slowly but surely the first tempestuous tide of feeling began to subside.

Helped by North's temporary absence at Alnchester, her pulses settled gradually into their new beat. She began to live, instead of being tossed hither and thither by the emotion of each moment.

She was waiting for North Branston now, as she sat by her drawing-room window with her eyes on the evening sky; waiting

for him for the second time only since he had asked her to be his wife; waiting for him for the first time with perfect satisfaction and unalloyed anticipation. She had received a telegram in the middle of the day saying that he would be detained by professional business until late. She had returned an impulsive answer to the effect that she should wait dinner for him. She had come into the drawing-room shortly after seven, and she had not moved since.

The last light of day faded from the quiet sky, the peaceful glow of summer darkness filled the sky, but the room was in complete shadow. The door opened suddenly, and an electric quiver shot through the womanly figure by the window. With the colour sweeping over her face in one hot, lovely rush, Lady Karslake rose without a word and stretched out both her hands towards the figure coming to her through the dimness. North Branston paused for an instant, almost as though startled. Then, also without a word but with an odd abruptness of movement, he took her in his arms.

She yielded to his touch with a self-abandonment as womanly as it was complete, but as his hold relaxed at last she drew herself away with an involuntary sigh. There had been an intensity in his touch which had made it almost painful. He caught the slight sound instantly.

"I'm too rough," he said, and his voice was harsh and bitter. "I beg your pardon."

She caught his hand and drew it round her, resting softly against his shoulder.

"No," she said, "don't!"

They were only two words, but spoken as she spoke them, they held that which further speech could only have spoiled. She stood so, her whole personality absorbed, as her absolute stillness testified, in the perfect sensation of the moment; and North stood holding her, and looked down at the delicate outline of her face in silence. Perhaps his silence was not what she expected—unconscious as she was of any expectation. Perhaps his touch, deprived of its intensity, seemed vaguely insufficient. After a moment or two she stirred and raised herself. Her voice, as she spoke, low and sweet, seemed to carry with it her intense sense of the newness of the position.

"Did you think I should be glad to see you?" she said. "Have you looked forward to this?"

"Yes!"

His voice was so deep as to be almost

gone and as he spoke the monosyllable one hand closed over the slender white fingers that lay on his breast, holding them as in a vice. The pressure half hurt her, as the force with which his brief response was weighted half frightened her, but she gave herself up to the moment and let its feeling fill her. She looked into his face, the colour coming and going in her own as she breathed, her eyes like stars.

"How strong you are!" she said, "How you hold me! Shall you hold me like this always?"

"Always, so help me Heaven!"

The words broke from North Branston with a vibration which contrasted almost harshly with the tone of the question. A thrill ran through her, and the fingers in his hand seemed to shrink. He released them abruptly, and at that instant the gong sounded. The sound, lightening the sudden strain, seemed to restore Lady Karlake to herself.

"Shall we go down?" she said, in that soft uncertain tone so eloquent of their new relation. They passed out of the dark drawing-room on to the brightly lighted staircase, and she went down before him, her movements swift and nervous in their unalterable grace. He had dined with her often before; but it is one of the mysterious properties of the change which had come upon them, that not the smallest incident of daily life is exempt from that first exquisite mist of the strange and unfamiliar in which the whole is enshrined.

It was not until they were seated at the dinner-table, not until some moments of dinner-table conversation had rendered the position less unreal, that Lady Karlake, glancing towards him with a trivial speech, saw North Branston's face fully for the first time that evening. Having glanced she did not turn her eyes away instantly, and their expression gradually changed.

North was looking white and haggard; dark curves about his eyes gave them an added sombreness. Physical fatigue, so far, might have accounted for his appearance; but it was not the signs of physical fatigue that had arrested Lady Karlake's attention. There was a set defiance about his expression. He looked not like a man satisfied and at rest, but like a man with war in his very soul.

He talked, during dinner, more than did Lady Karlake. A certain absent-mindedness seemed to have fallen upon her. And his talk was the talk of North Branston at his worst; clever, penetrated with cynicism

and pessimism. More than once Lady Karlake put his words aside with a quick expression of distaste; more than once she contradicted him impetuously; and almost directly after the servants had left the room she started up, leaving the dining-room with a rapid word of invitation to him to follow her.

When he joined her in the drawing-room a little later, she was wandering restlessly about the room. She stopped and turned, as he opened the door.

"Come and sit here," she said, "by the window, and tell me how you have thriven at Alchester."

She had let herself sink into her own chair, as she spoke, not looking at him; and as his voice fell upon her ear she started slightly. Quiet as it was, it seemed to cut like steel.

"I have thriven at Alchester as I might have expected to thrive! Not at all!"

She turned in her chair and looked at him. Then she said slowly:

"I don't think I understand. Have they not got over your coming to town? Were they not glad to see you?"

A harsh laugh broke from North, though he checked it instantly.

"No," he replied, "they were not glad to see me."

"That was abominable," she said. She had flushed a little. "Were they——" she hesitated, and her colour deepened; "were they not interested to hear your news?"

"No!" said North grimly.

Lady Karlake moved, pulling herself up in her chair with her hands clasped on one of its arms.

"What do you mean?" she said imperiously. "Were they—not pleased?"

"No."

There was something in the one curt word, a suppressed intensity of feeling which had nothing to do with her, before which Lady Karlake paused. She let herself sink back in her chair, the slender fingers of one outstretched hand still clasping its arm, her eyes fixed upon him with an enquiry, half surprised, half displeased, growing in their depths.

"Have you quarrelled with your sister?" she said.

North Branston rose abruptly and stood against the frame of the open French window, looking at her with gloomy eyes that hardly seemed to see her.

"I have," he said, with sudden vehemence.

mence. "That's nothing new, Heaven knows. But it's final this time. We've done with one another at last."

"If I am the cause," said Lady Karlake, "I suppose I ought to say that I am sorry."

Her tone was rather curious; there was a sarcastic ring in it that was hardly in keeping with her actual words. North, however, hardly seemed to hear her; he was absorbed in his own thoughts; and after a moment she went on, her hand beating gently against the arm of her chair.

"I did not know that you were so fond of your sister. I did not know that you had so keen a sense of family ties."

He laughed harshly, and the restless movement of her hand quickened ominously.

"Family ties!" he said. "The only family tie I've known has been the curse of my life, that's all. It is not wonderful if my sense of it is keen. Fond of my sister! No, you could scarcely have known that!"

"And yet," she said quickly, "your quarrel with her has spoilt—this evening for you. You are not happy, you can't forget her, you can't get away from your remembrance of what has happened, even with me."

The play of expression on her face, as she lifted it to watch him, was eloquent of the wayward feeling, so inseparable from such a temperament as hers so newly strung to its full pitch. But her expression hardly seemed to penetrate to North's understanding, though he looked down at her with a gaze that seemed for the first time to concentrate itself on her.

"Why do we talk of her?" he said, between his set teeth. "Why do we talk of her?"

Lady Karlake rose and began to move with nervous restlessness about the room.

"I choose to talk of her," she said impetuously. "I choose to understand you. If I am not everything to you, I am nothing. If I am everything to you, what does it matter if you quarrel with a hundred sisters?"

With the inevitable obtuseness of such a man where such a woman is concerned, North Branston failed to understand her drift even then. The chain that he had believed dissolved—that he had defied and repudiated—was dragging on him with an almost unendurable weight; and in some vague and inexplicable way her petulant words seemed to press home that which he was fiercely pushing from him.

"You don't know what you're talking of," he said. "For Heaven's sake let's say no more."

"I do know what I'm talking of," she flashed out tempestuously; "or, if I don't, explain it to me. If the annoyance that your sister causes you is greater than your satisfaction in our meeting, then she is more to you than I am. How else can it be! You want me to believe you love me. You've made me say that I love you. Of what consequence, then, is anything else in the world? How can you be affected by any outside circumstance? How can you be made glad or sorry by anything that doesn't touch ourselves?"

He turned away moodily, leaning his arm on the window frame.

"You will be disappointed," he said gloomily, "if you think of love like that."

She broke into a little ironical laugh.

"You should have told me that before," she said. "We ought to have compared notes on the subject, for evidently we don't agree. What's your idea of love—if mine is wrong?"

He did not answer immediately. His face was dark and cynical, like the face of a man who finds himself goaded when he should have been soothed, and accepts the alternative as part of the irony of life.

"The love of a man and a woman," he said, "may be an island which keeps them from going under altogether, but the sea of care, and failure, and bitterness, is all about it, and the waves beat unceasingly upon its shores. They must make up their breakwaters untiringly, and they must not expect to find the task an easy one."

His words, or his tone, or both, seemed to give the final touch to that jarring of her sensitive emotions begun almost with his arrival. She turned upon him sharply, her eyes flashing.

"We differ wholesale!" she said vehemently. "What I call love is something that annihilates failure, and care, and disappointment; that isolates the two who live in it, and draws them out of touch with the world and all its pains. No other love than this is worth the name!"

She turned away scornfully, and walked blindly to the other side of the room.

There was a moment's pause. North Branston looked at her averted frame heavily and uncertainly; then he passed his hand suddenly over his head, and his whole expression broke up. He strode across the room towards her.

"For Heaven's sake," he said hoarsely,

"don't let us quarrel! We may call things by different names, but there is something at the bottom stronger than our differences. Let us have patience with one another, for pity's sake."

There was a dead silence. He could see her fingers tearing nervously at her handkerchief. At last, slowly at first and almost reluctantly, she turned to him. She lifted her eyes to his, and impulsively stretched out her hands to him as bright tears started.

"Ah, no," she echoed hurriedly and piteously. "Don't—don't let us quarrel! If it is only an island, we are together on it, and we needn't listen—oh, we needn't listen—to the sound of the beating waves!"

CHAPTER XXX.

It was a glaring August day; and Dr. Vallotson's physical discomfort, as he pottered pompously home across the town, by no means tended to restore a serenity of spirit which had been incontinently reft from him.

Mrs. Vallotson's conduct with reference to North Branston's proposed marriage had been accepted by her husband according to his custom; but he had regarded it from the first with an unexpressed disapproval which was by no means customary in their relations. He regarded the connection with Lady Karslake as distinctly advantageous; and a quarrel with North, who had begun to figure rather prominently in his conversation with acquaintances as a distinguished authority, vexed his soul. The facts of the engagement, and of Mrs. Vallotson's violent opposition to it, had crept out in the town; Dr. Vallotson, mentioning the circumstance at home, had done so with a tentative and guilty air which left little doubt as to how the rumour had been started. And the doctor—his wife being absolutely unapproachable on the subject—had the matter mentioned to him on all hands. To find that the view taken by his interlocutors, one and all, was his own view, was, with a man of Dr. Vallotson's temperament, to inflame his opinion into an irritable opinionativeness which was all the more sore and self-conscious inasmuch as practical expression was denied it. On this particular August day an incident had occurred which had put the final touch to that sense of resentment and reprobation which had been swelling in him during the past three weeks; and it was hurrying him

on to an act to which perhaps nothing else could have nerved him.

He pushed open the gate that led into his own garden, heated in body and considerably over-heated in mind, and saw his wife just disappearing through the open hall door. Dr. Vallotson quickened his steps and followed her. Mrs. Vallotson was half-way upstairs when he entered the house, and he went on after her to her room. Just within the threshold he paused, a trifle nervously. Mrs. Vallotson was standing motionless on the other side of the room, with her back towards him.

"Adelaide, my dear——"

Dr. Vallotson had begun with an accentuation of his usual pompousness which might have been intended to conceal a tremulousness which, now that he found himself in his wife's presence, asserted itself; but he was cut short. It had not occurred to him as possible that Mrs. Vallotson should not have heard his step as he followed, but apparently such was the case. At the first sound of his voice she started violently, turning fiercely in the direction from which it came.

"Who is it?" she said roughly. "What is it?" Then as though her jarred perceptions were gradually settling down, she seemed to become aware of her husband's presence, and a flush of violent anger rushed over her face.

"Why couldn't you call me, Robert?" she exclaimed. "What do you mean by coming up behind me like that? Don't you know by this time that I don't like that kind of thing! Are my wishes of any consequence, or are they not?"

The vehemence with which she spoke was so sudden, so unexpected, so extraordinarily disproportionate to the occasion, that for the instant Dr. Vallotson could only gaze at her helplessly, while the resolution with which he was armed trembled in the balance. The instant passed; the flagrant injustice of her indignation added its weight to the charges already formulated in his mind against her; and prudence went to the winds. He drew himself up, inflating his chest portentously as Mrs. Vallotson continued with the same inexplicable passion:

"What do you want? If there's anything you want done, why can't you go to Constance? I can't see after everything. I never get a moment to myself from morning until night. What is it?"

"If you will allow me to speak," returned Dr. Vallotson, with that indignant

trembling of tone which invariably characterised his rare encounters with his wife, "I will explain in a very few words. I merely want a few minutes' conversation with you, and I really fail to see that it is such an unreasonable request."

"Well, go on."

Dr. Vallotson cleared his throat and continued.

"The subject is not a pleasant one," he said, "but I feel it my duty to open it. I cannot longer stand by to watch conduct which I—and not I alone—consider mistaken to the last degree, without offering some slight protest. I—I allude to the matter of your brother's engagement."

As he came at last to the point and stood committed, Dr. Vallotson had grown nervous, flustered, and consequently violent. And as he uttered his last words it seemed as though all the feeling of the moment had passed suddenly from the flushed, furious woman to the little self-conscious, agitated man. As though a sudden pall had been dropped over it, every shade of expression faded from Mrs. Vallotson's face; every trace of the burning colour died away, except where it lingered on her cheeks in two faint patches of red. Her pallor was ashen; there were heavy shadows under her eyes; and, seen thus in repose, there was a drawn fixity of expression in every line of her face. She looked like a woman consumed day and night by some hidden torture, and set to resist its ravages with the last breath in her body.

She turned deliberately away.

"I will not hear the subject mentioned," she said.

Under ordinary circumstances her tone would have terminated the conversation; its only effect now was to add the intoxicating sense of reckless daring to Dr. Vallotson's unusual emotions.

"Pardon me, my dear," he said grandiloquently, "but I have something to say on the subject to which I must request you to listen. I feel that the time has come when we must arrive at an understanding."

"I will not hear the subject mentioned."

She spoke in precisely the same measured, inexorable tone, and the blood began to boil impotently in Dr. Vallotson's veins.

"But the subject is mentioned," he said. "It is mentioned in every house in Alnchester. Every one in Alnchester is conversant with every detail of the arrangements except ourselves. Something has

occurred this morning which has brought to a point beyond which I cannot suffer it to pass unmentioned the very painful concern under which I have laboured for some time." He paused, reinforcing himself with a wave of his pocket-handkerchief. "I will not attempt to point out to you what my chagrin has been," he continued, "I will not enlarge upon the painful impression produced upon the whole city. I will simply ask you, Adelaide, whether you consider it seemly that I should have to be informed of the date fixed for the marriage of your brother at the hands of one of my own patients!"

Dr. Vallotson's emotion had touched its consummation at last. He had risen to his climax with all that swelling dignity of tone which keen personal sense of humiliation can produce, and he waited majestically for its effect.

No effect whatever seemed to have been produced.

Mrs. Vallotson did not turn round. The mechanical movements with which she was smoothing out her gloves had stopped suddenly, but that was all. At last, when her husband was beginning to doubt whether she had understood his words, she spoke.

"When?" she said.

The word revived Dr. Vallotson's courage. "When?" he returned with pained severity. "When indeed, Adelaide! I have only to ask you what could be more deplorable than the necessity for such a question! It is to take place on the tenth of September. The information comes to me through Miss Baines, who heard it indirectly from Archdeacon French, who is to perform the ceremony."

There was no answer. For a moment Mrs. Vallotson stood absolutely motionless; then the movement of her fingers began again in silence.

The silence seemed to Dr. Vallotson to give him the advantage.

"I feel," he said loftily, "that the deplorable incident forms a crisis, at which it is absolutely necessary that the matter should be represented to you in its true light. I have had some little opportunity of observing how this—this truly deplorable breach between yourself and North Branstons is looked upon by our neighbours, and I cannot but know that your conduct in the matter—dictated in the first instance, as I am well aware, by a high sense of duty—is condemned. It is generally agreed that your original protest is much to be applauded,

but that the time has come for reconciliation."

Dr. Vallotson paused. He was out of breath, and he was also rather nervous. To be allowed to deliver himself without let or hindrance, was not what he had expected. Being prepared for resentment, absolute passivity had disconcerted him strangely; and the end of his speech had been characterised with a conciliatory tone which had developed in spite of himself. He waited a moment, tremulously expectant, but no word or sign came from his wife, even to indicate that she had heard him. He went on persuasively and tentatively.

"The marriage in itself is hardly one which we need deplore," he said. "Indeed, I may say that it is not destitute of advantages. Nor do I see that anything is gained by a quarrel on the subject. It will create one of those family breaches so much to be regretted, but it will hardly influence events. Pardon my reminding you, my dear, that you cannot prevent the marriage."

Again Dr. Vallotson stopped, and again his words were followed by a blank silence. Mrs. Vallotson's lips were compressed to a thin grey line, and the sombreness of her eyes seemed to shut in a sullen, unyielding defiance.

"So what do you think, my love?" continued Dr. Vallotson, with a comfortableness of tone which was not quite so certain or so genuine as it might have been. "Don't you think now that it would be as well to bury the past, and withdraw your opposition? If you were to run up to London and see them—that would be a very pleasant plan, it seems to me. A nice little change like that would do you good. You could, of course, make Lady Karslake understand, if you thought well, what were your first feelings on the subject. And then you might stay in town for the wedding. I dare say Connie would like to go with you."

For the first time since he had introduced the subject, Mrs. Vallotson turned to her husband; turned with a sudden rough force that startled him.

"I dare say she would," she said, in a hoarse, abrupt voice. "But she will have to do without it! You're talking nonsense, and I'm busy!"

"You will not go?"

"No."

There was that in the monosyllable before which Dr. Vallotson's courage oozed away. He did not argue the point.

NOTES ON FAMILIAR FOOD.

We pride ourselves on being an eminently practical people, not logical, not close and accurate reasoners, but plain and matter-of-fact.

Well, let us see how we show our common sense. Our County Councils are now teaching cooking, and very intelligent and clever women are commissioned to show how food is to be cooked. They are usually supplied with the most costly and elaborate apparatus, which only the kitchens of the rich commonly contain; and then the teacher sets forth before women, whose husbands earn a pound a week, the charms of plain cooking—plain enough, no doubt, the chefs of some Dukes would call it, but ridiculously costly and inappropriate withal in any working man's humble abode. Butter and new-laid eggs figure largely, and as the teacher has not to pay for them, she waxes eloquent and insists upon such a lavish use of both, that were her lessons generally acted upon there would soon be a mighty famine in the land. But the poor don't come; the rich can do without such teaching, for others do their work; and only a few ladies in the middle classes with very enquiring minds put in an appearance. "Let the teacher," said a poor woman, "come to my house and show me how to cook there, and then I shall be obliged to her." Here is the test of good cheap cooking—to cook with little money; a small, smoking fire; a miserable oven; a couple of saucepans, and no scales; and sometimes more mouths to feed than food to put into them.

The certainty and rapidity with which the vast population of the United Kingdom is fed is too familiar and taken too much as a matter of course to need any remarks, but it was not always so. When the population was only one-fourteenth of its present density famines were common, and the superabundance of one place could seldom be drawn upon to supplement the deficit of another. In the closing year of Edward the Third, when there was land enough to give every family a large farm almost for the asking, there was widespread misery, and at times actual destitution—so bad was the cultivation of the country, so great the difficulty of storing and removing food to distant places. The most fertile districts could not then have carried a population as dense as that of the wildest mountain regions of Wales in our day.

Does any one ever doubt the regularity of his daily meals? Who ever heard of a dearth of the necessaries of life? Were supplies to run short, the telegraph would apprise the whole world of our need, and in a few hours hundreds of vessels would be on their way with abundant supplies; and should our population go on multiplying, as unfortunately it seems likely to do, there is no ground to fear an insufficiency as long as we avoid war with the other great naval Powers. Were we so unfortunate as to find ourselves involved in hostilities with France or America, we might feel the pinch of hunger and be starved into submission; and then we might learn the value of cheap food, and not turn with disgust from those simple and abundant supplies which Nature has provided for us.

Do we, for example, make enough of eggs? The lecture on eggs given a few years ago by Mr. Simmonds before the Society of Arts, deserved careful consideration. Eggs, he thought, were a neglected mine of wealth. They are the one article of agricultural produce for which there is an unlimited demand, and perhaps the only one in which we might defy foreign competition. They not only mean money, but they command prices—so, at least, the lecturer said—that admit of profit compared with which beef and mutton are of secondary importance, and wheat barely worth mentioning. Hens lay eggs which, if not made of gold, are capable of being turned into it, when they can be retailed, all the year round, at little short of a penny apiece, while the eggs of ducks bring still higher prices. Eggs are a perfect meal in themselves; everything necessary to the support of human life being contained in them in the proper proportions and the most palatable form. Plain boiled they are wholesome, although masters of French cookery tell us that it is possible to dress them in more than five hundred different ways, all not only economical, but wholesome. No healthy appetite ever rejected an egg in some guise; it is the most concentrated form of nutriment, and served up in the most pleasant fashion, whole nations rarely touching any other animal food. Kings eat them plain as readily as do their humblest tribesmen. Nay, after the victory of Muhlendorf, when the Kaiser Ludwig sat at meat with his burgraves and great captains, he determined on a piece of luxury: “one egg to every man, and two to the excellently valiant Schwepperman.”

Far more than fish, eggs are the scholar's fare; they contain phosphorus, which is brain food, and sulphur, which discharges many functions in the economy; and they are the best nutriment for children, for they comprise everything necessary to the growth of the youthful frame. Eggs are not food only; they are also medicine. The white is a most useful application to burns, and the oil from the yolk is regarded by the Russians as an almost miraculous salve for cuts, bruises, and scratches. A raw egg, swallowed in time, will detach a fish-bone stuck in the throat, and the white of two renders a dose of corrosive sublimate as harmless as calomel; they strengthen the consumptive, invigorate the feeble, and render the most susceptible almost proof against jaundice in its most malignant forms. They can also be drunk in the shape of that “egg-flip” which sustains the oratorical efforts of the modern statesman. The merits of eggs do not end here. In France wine clarifiers use more than eighty millions a year, and the Alsatians make away with fully thirty-eight millions in calico printing and in dressing the leather used in making the finest French kid gloves. Finally, they may almost without trouble be converted into fowls, which are profitable to the seller and welcome to the buyer. Even eggshells are valuable, for allopath and homeopath alike regard them as the purest carbonate of lime.

In spite of these facts, it is humiliating that an article of commerce, to produce which requires hardly any capital, and which is saleable in any quantity, is so little attended to that the supply is in England altogether unequal to the demand. How many eggs are laid in the British Islands can only be roughly conjectured. According to the latest agricultural returns there are, in the United Kingdom, twenty million barndoor fowls, though, as the poultry owned by cottagers were not, except in Ireland, included, the return must be much under the mark, and twenty-five millions might be nearer the number. If we deduct permanent non-layers, in the shape of male birds, and the eleven millions which reach the market as poultry for the table, the remainder represent sitting hens and chicken. Some fowls lay two hundred and twenty eggs a year, others do not give a third of that number. But if each hen is credited with one hundred eggs, there should be at least six hundred millions of eggs from our home fowl-houses. This prodigious number is trifling compared with

the quantity actually required, for if the egg-eaters of the United Kingdom are put at twenty-five millions, it would only admit of each one having twenty-four per annum, and that is far under the mark. Many middle-class families use at breakfast and for cooking a hundred a week, while confectioners, hotels, restaurants, and many other miscellaneous consumers must every day get through four or five times as many, to say nothing of the cratefuls absorbed in many arts and manufactures. In a single photographic establishment two millions are used every year; while the number in calico printing, leather dressing, and, we believe, bookbinding processes must almost exceed the number used as food. How are the wants of Britain supplied? Our eggs are not manufactured, as an ingenious myth some years ago affirmed was the case. The simple explanation is that they are imported. The extent to which they are brought across the sea is shown by the fact that last year we paid three million pounds to foreign farmers for eggs, every pound of which might have remained at home for the British agriculturist's benefit. An annual outlay of three millions of pounds means that the eggs for which this was paid must have come into our ports at the rate of more than three millions and a quarter on every working day. To this branch of the British commissariat France contributes most largely, Germany and Belgium coming next.

Every year these importations are increasing—the number brought from the Continent in 1865 only being a third of that of a year or two ago, and this enormous number does not include the eggs of ducks, geese, and turkeys, or of plovers and other wild birds, for which high prices are invariably given. Calculating one penny as the average price for an egg, although this is a very high estimate much above wholesale prices, a person whose statistics do not seem open to objection reckons the total cost of our egg supply at nearly six million seven hundred thousand pounds. Leaving out the tons of fowls which are imported, it is certain that if our farmers would bestir themselves, not one farthing need go out of the kingdom to purchase eggs, and they might pocket the three millions which the peasant farmers of France, Germany, Belgium, and Holland draw from us. Little capital is required; for great fowl-farms have never paid, unless the hens have a large extent of waste land to roam over. If confined in a narrow

space they are apt, as the proprietor of the town fowl-house knows to his cost, to sicken and die, and in any case their laying falls off. The vast quantities brought from the Continent are collected by travelling higglers from peasant farmers and cottagers, and it is to this class, if the Allotment Act proves workable, that we must look for a diminution of our imports of fowls and eggs. Plenty of farms are at present unlet, which might be utilised for fowl fattening and egg producing. The grain-growing farmer does not care much for flocks of hens, geese, and turkeys; they destroy, he declares, more than they are worth. But in many instances, the soil of some of those English farms which are going out of cultivation is too indifferent to grow wheat or barley, although admirably fitted for poultry rearing and egg producing. Many tracts in the Highlands, good neither for sheep nor game, might be utilised for fowl rearing with some prospect of greater profit than from growing oats. In some parts of Surrey and Sussex, fowl fattening for the London market has recently greatly extended, but little intelligent enterprise is displayed in obtaining the best layers, although the greatest possible differences exist in the size and quality of eggs. A fowl which lays two hundred and twenty eggs per annum is exceptional, but even in Inverness-shire, one hundred and thirty-five to one hundred and fifty per annum are a common return from a single good hen. A score of Irish eggs weigh under two pounds, while the same number of good Dorkings weigh six ounces more. These facts ought to encourage home growers, and teach them the value of careful selection.

While on the subject of agriculture, what a contrast there was between the price of wheat in 1806 and that in 1892! The books of the late Mr. Buckle, who at Michaelmas, 1805, took possession of Barton Farm, in Whippingham Parish, Isle of Wight, teach some curious lessons. Mr. Whitmarsh, the outgoing tenant, summer-fallowed a field of forty acres for wheat, for this he was allowed fifty pounds; this was sown in due season and yielded forty loads of marketable corn, the latter was sold at forty pounds per load! Her Majesty is now the owner of Barton as part of the Osborne Estate; at the beginning of the century it belonged to Lady Isabella Blashford, who appears on the books of 1815. At the date named, a load of wheat would buy a team of good

cart-horses, while swedes were just beginning to be grown by a few of the most enterprising farmers in the Island.

But even in the good old days farming had its drawbacks, as a curious letter which recently appeared in one of the Dorset papers will show. The writer says: "I happened to live sixty years ago at Bryants-puddle, a part of the parish adjoining Tolpuddle, where my father was a farmer. As a child I can well remember our anxiety lest we should be amongst the number of the victims to fire which was threatened to all farmers. The rioters were not men, as at present, wanting to work only eight hours a day, but were for breaking to pieces all machines likely to supersede manual labour on the farm, especially the newly-invented threshing machines. These men were very well satisfied with their very poor wages of eight shillings a week, and were afraid they would be deprived even of these. Arson was at that time a common crime in Dorset, and not long after a youth, named Christopher Wilkins, was hanged at Dorchester for arson at Bridport. People did not much commiserate the rioters."

Closely allied with farming is the game trade. I shall not pretend to discuss the justice or injustice of the game laws; it cannot, however, be denied by any one who has lived in a district abounding in well-stocked preserves, that they provide abundant well-paid employment for gamekeepers and watchers, a ready market to the farmers for a vast amount of produce, and that liberal compensation is generally given to tenants whose crops suffer from the depredations of game. Moreover, land near the coverts lets for much less than other land equally good. "The trade in game is a strange one," wrote Mr. George Dodd, in his "Food of London," a most instructive and, at the time when it was first published in 1856, a most exhaustive work. The foreign game and poultry trade with this country is now positively gigantic. We imported a year or two ago, in splendid condition, one million two hundred thousand fowls, five hundred thousand ptarmigan, two hundred thousand black game, above ten thousand partridges, and over one million wild ducks. The vast bulk of all this comes from Russia, but immense shipments, especially of ducks, come from Norway and Holland, while the Dominion will probably soon send us large quantities.

To contrast these figures with those given by Mr. Dodd thirty-five years ago in the "Food of London" is startling. The

quantities of game then annually sold in Newgate and Leadenhall markets were about one million eight hundred and fifty thousand native and foreign head, and of this total eight hundred and fifty thousand were rabbits. Larks came next, giving an average of one hundred thousand, partridges touched one hundred and fifty thousand, and pheasants only sixty-four thousand; grouse stood at fifty-seven thousand, while snipe went up to one hundred and seven thousand, and ranging between a maximum of forty thousand and a minimum of ten thousand came plovers, woodcock, widgeon, and teal. The hares in those days were a little over one hundred thousand; and Newgate had also the credit of selling forty thousand stone of venison a year. Foreign game was beginning to reach us, while the trade in Ostend rabbits, killed and skinned in Belgium, was rapidly growing. Still more curious cargoes occasionally arrived. Thus, in 1856, a shipment of seventeen thousand quails was made at Civita Vecchia to Liverpool, whence the little strangers were conveyed by rail to London. It must be remembered that large though the consumption of game was when the "Food of London" was written, the trade was, comparatively speaking, in its infancy. Only twenty years before the publication of this remarkable book the sale of game was illegal, and it was only with extreme risk, with the help of many a sly device, that it could reach the markets at all. The grim shadow of William Rufus and the Forest Laws continued to frown on the dinner-tables of the middle classes. Down to the accession of William the Fourth, a heavy property qualification was required for the right to kill game, and fearful penalties were inflicted on unqualified persons for killing game, and for having engines for snaring it, or even for being in the possession of game. The laws against poaching are still stringent enough, but they are not so barbarously tyrannical and inhuman as they were two generations ago. Although by the Act of William the Fourth every person who had taken out a certificate was entitled to shoot game, subject to the law of trespass, which included the prohibition to kill on public roads and highways, it was not until the passing of the Acts Victoria the First and Second, that permission was granted to sell game, the dealers being required to take out an annual license. Up to this time the most extraordinary subterfuges had been resorted to, to evade the law. Nevertheless, in

spite of the penal clauses, there was little difficulty in obtaining a hare or a pheasant for dinner, but when the bill was made out the hare was charged as a "lion" and the pheasant as an "eagle," or something equally ingenious. From this underhand method of game dealing probably arose one of our strangest national peculiarities, but one that most diners-out would be reluctant to change. We are said to be the only civilised nation that invariably, and from preference, eats game "high," and woodcock and venison in an almost putrid condition. The reason for what might otherwise be condemned as a depraved taste among English epicures is, that in the last century the nobility and the squirearchy were often greatly puzzled to know what to do with the game they shot. They could not eat pheasants, partridges, and hares every day; had they done so, satiety, or perhaps blood poisoning, would have resulted. Even fat haunch of venison and venison pasty cloy after a while. They might make presents to their neighbours, but their neighbours were principally noblemen and squires with ample preserves. So the game was smuggled up to London, and "swapped" for fish, and the fishmongers in the course of business sold it to rich merchants and professional families with no preserves of their own. But during its sojourn in the squire's larder, its abode in the lumbering waggon which brought it to the metropolis, and its residence in the fishmonger's cellar, it had usually become exceedingly "high," and the gourmet classes in time became as fond of high game as George the First was of bad oysters. His Majesty could get no others in Hanover, and had to be satisfied with what he could get; and his middle-class subjects were, as regards game, in the same predicament, and when they wanted to eat game, had to be content with it decidedly high. Working-class people are, as a rule, not fonder of game than they are of claret. Our domestic servants will neither eat the one nor drink the other, and their prejudices are shared by the classes from which they are drawn. The poor man and his family, however, delight in rabbits. Bunny boiled, "smothered in onions," roast, baked, hashed, or in a pie, is a viand of which those whose lot it is to labour with their hands never tire; and rabbits are cheap.

Hare is not popular; it will not boil soft; it is a dark, dry, and unattractive meat, which if it be roasted must be lubricated and basted with large quantities of fat

before it eats tenderly, and jugging is far too expensive, difficult, and tedious for the poor man's limited resources. It makes admirable soup, but the poor man's wife remains hopelessly in the dark as to the preparation of any soup except kettle broth, which seems to consist mainly of hot water. It is among the upper classes—the genteel section of society—that those are found who would be affected by a diminution of the game supply. The habitual eating of game has come to be a regular part of the scheme of modern civilisation, which likes snowy napery, bright plate, shining crystal, and pretty flowers on its dinner-table. A little dinner of six is not complete without a dish of game before the sweets and cheese; nay, at much smaller symposia, at dinners, perhaps, at which the only guests are husband and wife, or a couple of friends, the *pièce de résistance* is often a pheasant, a partridge, a grouse, a brace of woodcock, or a wild duck, instead of a joint. Thousands of people with moderate incomes and without any wish to be extravagant, like to live "nicely," and to this very numerous class any diminution in the supply of game would be a serious grievance.

Another dainty, which is getting much dearer, and threatening to become almost too dear for any pockets but the longest and the best filled, is the oyster. Whatever the reason may be, the price has gone steadily up, and now a dozen cost little less than half a hundred did a generation ago. Oysters are a favourite dish, and though so dear and so little satisfying there are still plenty of people who do not hesitate to buy them, though to eat them is almost like eating money. Game is a real food, but the oyster can hardly claim to be more than a condiment or a flavourer; to make it a substantial part of the diet or even of a single meal a day, would mean an outlay that no middle-class family could contemplate without dismay.

Dr. Baster, according to Dr. Johnson, thought the Roman fondness for oysters was a sanitary one. "Living oysters," says Dr. Baster, "are endowed with proper medicinal virtues; they nourish wonderfully and solicit rest; for he who sups on oysters is wont on that night to sleep placidly; and to the valetudinary afflicted with a weak stomach, oppressed with phlegm or bile, eight, ten, or twelve raw oysters in a morning, or one hour before dinner, is more healing than any drug that the apothecary can compound." This

fashion of sharpening the appetite for dinner continues to the present day, and it is not uncommon, in a hospitable house, to be pressed to take a few oysters before dinner; but that an oyster supper promotes sound and refreshing sleep admits of serious doubt, while as for the medicinal value of this tempting mollusc, that too is most improbable.

Fresh oysters are confessedly delicious, but oysters that have been kept some days! Our own George the First, as we have mentioned above, is said to have been inordinately fond of—well—high oysters. His august Majesty could not get fresh oysters at Hanover, so he was fain to be content with what he could get, and it was not the fault of his cooks that when they reached his table the oysters were in such a state that our modern food inspectors would unhesitatingly have condemned them as unfit for human food; but the King did not mind, and had his fill of his favourite mollusc.

To come to something which modern science no longer reckons to be a food—I mean alcohol—a good deal of curious information is to be picked up as to the amount got through in civilised countries. A peculiarity of alcohol certainly is that in all ages and in almost all countries it has found many votaries. In some shape or another alcohol is used by nearly all classes in all parts of the civilised world, and there seems to be no limit to the quantity that can be got through, only given the means to purchase it.

Recent official calculations show that in the United States the consumption of distilled spirits fell from eighty million gallons in 1870 to seventy-six millions in 1888, in spite of an increase of twenty millions in the population, and a still greater proportionate increase in the national wealth; but the consumption of wine rose from twelve million gallons in 1870 to thirty-six millions in 1888; and of malt liquor, from two hundred and five million gallons in 1870 to seven hundred and sixty-seven millions in 1888. From this it would appear that a very remarkable change is going on in the habits of the people, and that whilst the consumption of spirits is decreasing, that of wine and beer is largely on the increase. The greater wealth of the States accounts for the larger consumption of wine, the most costly of all alcoholic beverages in cold countries. In France the consumption of spirits has greatly increased since 1871. In England there was,

for a few years, thanks perhaps in part to Sir Benjamin Richardson, a marked decrease in the outlay on all sorts of intoxicating liquors, but the last few years have again shown an increase. In Germany the use of spirits is stationary, but that of beer has increased, and possibly the larger consumption of beer in the States may be mainly due to the immense number of Germans now settled in America. The difficulty of making any comparison between country and country, and class and class, is due to every nation having intoxicating beverages to which it is addicted, and these differ greatly in their percentage of alcohol. The annual consumption of wine in the whole of Europe is one thousand nine hundred and ninety-one million gallons; of beer and cider, two thousand nine hundred and seventy-five millions; of spirits, three hundred and forty-two millions. This is equal to the consumption of five hundred and twenty-three million gallons of alcohol, or 1·6 gallons per head. The amount consumed in the United States is equivalent to 1·2 gallons; in Canada to 1·0 gallons; and in Australia to 1·2 gallons per head. These figures are curious and suggestive. In explanation of the large consumption of alcohol in France, it might be argued, if we did not know in other ways that there had been an enormous increase in the consumption of intoxicants, that wine is commonly used there at all meals, whereas tea, coffee, and other liquors, are taken in many other countries. The French dram-shops have enormously increased in number, and insanity and intemperance have increased with them, and French writers are recognising the dangers that threaten their fatherland. These facts throw a lurid light on the fallacious reports so generally circulated as to the sobriety of wine-drinking countries, unless we assume, as perhaps we are justified in doing, that in wine-drinking countries total abstinence is almost unheard of, all grown-up people drinking moderately, while in England we have millions of practical abstainers to set against a vast army of intemperate men and women.

The economic aspect is no less important. Mr. Mulhall gives some comparative information, but as he reckons only the cost "in bond," exclusive of the duties which, in England for instance, are very high, and make the national Drink Bill look excessively large, his estimate very much understates the amount actually paid by the consumer, who in the United Kingdom contributes thirty millions a year to the revenue.

The conditions are so diverse in these countries, that any useful comparison is impossible, but we have a significant fact when we compare the two great branches of the Anglo-Saxon race. The Briton is said to spend twice as much on alcohol as the American; this may be accurate, though most travellers would fancy, and perhaps correctly, that the latter drinks as freely as the former, and in some districts much more freely. This apparent contradiction may be due to the lower price of stimulants or to systematic evasion of duty in the States.

The yearly drink bills of Europe, the United States, Canada, and Australia are reckoned to be as follows, though the figures are probably not mathematically accurate, and can only be the rudest approximations.

For two thousand and seventeen million gallons of wine, one hundred and sixty-seven million pounds; for three thousand six hundred and eighty-four million gallons of beer, cider, and perry, two hundred and forty million pounds; for four hundred and twenty million gallons of spirits, eighty-five million pounds. The cost of intoxicants in these countries may therefore be estimated at the lowest to reach four hundred and ninety-two million pounds!

But even within the United Kingdom there are remarkable differences, as may be seen by comparing the figures of 1885, when the consumption of beer in England was thirty-two gallons per head, in Scotland sixteen, and in Ireland sixteen; the consumption of cider in England 0.4, and none at all in the other two countries; the consumption of spirits in England 0.8, in Scotland 1.9, in Ireland 1; the consumption of wine 0.5 in England, 0.5 in Scotland, and 0.2 in Ireland. The English drinker's partiality for beer and the Scotch and the Irish drinker's preference for spirits is clearly shown. When these amounts are converted into their equivalents of alcohol, we see that Ireland consumes least—1.4 gallons per head, Scotland comes next with 1.6, and England heads the list with 2.13 gallons of alcohol for each man, woman, and child of the population; this, by a curious and undesigned coincidence, is just under one ounce a day per head, the quantity which so many medical authorities assume can be safely taken—the physiological quantity of which the country has heard so much of late years. Children seldom touch alcohol, most women take little, and many men do not take any at

all; so that the habitual consumers of alcohol, whether they drink to excess or not, get through three or four times the amount which the leading medical authorities assert should not be exceeded.

EBB AND FLOW.

Up at your grave, my darling, where the great tides ebb and flow,
Where the tall cross faces the wild west wind, and the early snowdrops blow.
Up at your grave, my darling, the steps grow weak and slow,
The dim eyes scarcely see the waves where the great tides ebb and flow.
The ears are dull to the music where the great tides ebb and flow,
The crash of the rollers lacks the spell they wove me long ago.
So many hopes have failed me, so many dreams lie low,
Since I left your rest upon the Head where the great tides ebb and flow.
Yet one thing never alters, as the great tides ebb and flow.
As I loved you then, I love you now, and in Heaven, my dear, you know.

MR. DUDDER'S TEMPTATION.

A COMPLETE STORY.

"PLEASE, sir," said my clerk, "there's a man wants to see you."

"Is there, Toby?" said I, rousing myself somewhat unwillingly from a day-dream of many clients. "What sort of a man?"

"Well, sir," replied Toby, looking rather puzzled, "he's—well, he's what they call in the police reports 'respectably dressed.' Wears a blue ribbon in his buttonhole, and looks as if he had a little bit of 'ouse property. Name of Dudley I think he said, sir."

As Toby is deaf enough to make his habit of listening at the door of my private office a mere harmless eccentricity, I was not surprised to find that the respectably-dressed man's name was not Dudley, but Duddel.

"I was recommended to you, sir," he began, "by the Vicar of the parish. I'm a Nonconformist myself, but when I want advice on worldly matters I go to the clergy of the Church of England as by law established."

"Indeed!" said I. "May I ask why?"

"Well," he explained, "they're in a way, you know, guaranteed by Government, and our ministers ain't. There's the same difference exactly as there is between house property or companies' shares and Government Stock."

"I think I follow you," said I, though

to tell the truth I was somewhat bewildered by this strange analogy. "And now, what can I do for you?"

"Well," said he, "I've got a bit of property, and I want to have it guaranteed by Government the same as is the respectability of the Church of England. That is, I want to sell all that I have and give to—I beg pardon, sir. Since I came into money my mind keeps running on that text, though I never could persuade myself it was meant for these times. I should have said, and buy Consols."

Now as a solicitor I naturally favour mortgages as investments, especially when I see a chance of drawing up the deed myself.

"I am afraid you would sacrifice a considerable proportion of your income by taking such a course, Mr. Duddel," said I. "Now, if——"

"Oh, I don't mind that, sir," he interrupted. "I calculate my bit of property ought to fetch forty thousand pounds, there or thereabouts, and that, even at two per cent., brings in eight hundred a year according to the ready reckoner. Considering that me and the missis have rubbed along on about thirty shillings a week for the last twenty years, we ought to find that enough, don't you think?"

Forty thousand pounds! Here was a client indeed! Did my prospective father-in-law, the Reverend Anthony Simpson, I wondered, know what a remarkably successful fly he had advised to walk into my parlour?

"Ah!" said I, doing my best not to let my tone betray my pleasure at the prospect before me. "I see. You want, above all things, to be free from care and business worry. To put yourself in a position to say, 'I spend my dividends; my banker does the rest.'"

"Just so, sir," replied Mr. Duddel.

Just so. Since the building society, to which I trusted my savings, came to grief, I put no faith in bricks and mortar; and when this money came to me through the death of a half-brother I'd not seen or even heard of since I was a boy, I says to my wife, 'Government security or nothing, this time, Jane'; and Jane being quite agreeable, as soon as we'd settled here—Sawbury, sir, is my wife's native place—I called on the Reverend Simpson, and he advised me to come to you."

"Then how, Mr. Duddel," I asked, "is your property at present disposed?"

The bulk of it, it appeared, consisted of

little houses in the poorer parts of London—a few in Bethnal Green, half-a-dozen in Camberwell, one or two in Hackney, and so on—but there was a good deal of personalty as well, all of which was invested in excellent securities which there was no earthly reason for selling. On the whole it seemed a most desirable property, and I felt that any little difficulties which the management of it presented could easily and profitably be smoothed away by a smart young solicitor with plenty of time to place at the owner's disposal.

I hinted as much to Mr. Duddel, but it was no good. He would allow me, within reasonable limits, plenty of time to dispose of it to the best advantage, but disposed of it must be—"every brick and every share," he emphatically declared—and the proceeds invested in whatever description of Government Stock gave the best return for the money. This, of course, settled the question, and, after arranging a few preliminary details and fixing a time for our next interview, we parted.

"Toby," said I, as soon as Mr. Duddel had gone, "run down to Lowe's and tell them to paint 'John Duddel, Esquire,' on the largest deed-box they have in stock, and send it up as soon as they can."

"Oh, crikey!" cried Toby, pointing with thumb over shoulder towards the street. "All that for him? Well, he don't look worth it, do 'e? But there, you never can tell by their togs how they stand at the bank."

Though I felt it my duty to rebuke Toby, I could not conscientiously deny that the personal appearance of my new client bore witness to the truth of his aphorism. Mr. Duddel certainly was dressed more in accordance with his former station in life—he had been a cheesemonger's shopman—than with his present one. He also bore himself much more humbly towards the universe at large than did the other half-dozen gentlemen of independent means who tolerated Sawbury as a place of residence; nor had he acquired that art of looking at things in general with an I-could-buy-that-if-I-liked-but-it-really-Isn't-worth-it expression which goes so far to distinguish these rich men from their impetuous fellow-citizens.

Consequently Mr. Duddel, though he soon became popular in Sawbury, was never so much respected as he might have been had he been able or willing to acquire a mysterious something which Toby called "side."

"He's as nice a gentleman, sir," said Toby—nice and liberal, are, I fear, convertible terms in Toby's vocabulary—"as ever stepped into this office. Ain't it a pity he don't get more swagger on him?"

Now I liked Mr. Duddel so well as he was that I should have been sorry to see any change in him; but Mrs. Duddel, whose acquaintance I soon made, was quite of Toby's opinion, though she expressed herself differently.

"I do wish Duddel would drop that tread-on-me-I-rather-like-it way he has," said she, with a sigh. "It was all very well, perhaps, when he had a master to please, and a situation to keep, but now he could buy up half the tradesmen in Sawbury, it does vex me to see him go into a shop looking that meek, I wonder they serve him. Why, the very minister at the chapel, though Duddel's promised to guarantee him a fifty-pound rise in salary, puts upon him; and as for his wife—but I'll soon show that young woman her place, depend upon it."

Unfortunately the proper way of conducting oneself under a sudden rise in the world was not the only point on which Mr. and Mrs. Duddel differed. He was a strict teetotaler; she had a weakness for bottled stout. He objected to public entertainments of any kind, but particularly to dramatic entertainments; she patronised every touring company that visited the town. He was staunch to his chapel; she, after the failure of her attempt to reduce the minister's wife to subjection, persisted in going to church. He delighted in acting as a sort of amateur relieving officer; she wanted to set up a carriage and pair. Her costumes were as gaudy and as unsuitable to a stout, red-faced woman of five-and-forty, as his dress was plain; and her temper was as trying as his was placid. I cannot say they quarrelled. It proverbially takes two to make anything worth calling a fight, and Mr. Duddel persistently refused, even under the most extreme provocation, to fall to with any spirit. He did not, however, pretend that he lived happily with his wife.

"I can't make it out, though, Maitland," said he one day, about a year after his first call. "When we lived in one room there was hardly ever a cross word between us, unless maybe Jane was tired with the washing or something, and now, when we've got a house that big I almost lose myself in it at times, we're wrangling and jangling from morning till night. It's my

fault more than hers, I dare say, though the money does seem to have changed her. Before it came she never touched liquor, and as for play-acting, she no more thought of wasting her time at it than I did. If it wasn't that I daren't desert my post as steward of it, I'd hand over my money to some charity and go back to the old life. I would indeed."

I have often found that rich men who ostentatiously profess to be merely "stewards" of their wealth are most abominably unjust ones, but Mr. Duddel was an exception to the rule. He was, I am certain, sincere in his frequently expressed belief that he simply held his money in trust for the benefit of the poor, and no one could deny that he acted up to his professions.

Even his wife, who paid me an unexpected visit at my office only a few days after he had thus bewailed his lot, bore testimony to his lavish, if not always judicious, generosity.

"Give!" said she.—She wanted, it appeared, a few pounds for her private use, and I had suggested that she had better ask her husband for them.—"Yes, Duddel would give the coat off his back to the first dirty tramp who had impudence enough to ask for it, but his lawful wife's another matter altogether. I declare to you, Mr. Maitland, I had more money to do what I liked with in the old days than I have now. Why, nowadays, even my poor drop of stout goes down in the grocer's bill, and Duddel groans and turns up the whites of his eyes over paying for it as if it was so much liquid gold. As I tell him, many a woman in my position would touch nothing more common than champagne, or leastways port and sherry wine."

"But, my dear madam," said I, "I'm afraid you mistake Mr. Duddel's motives. His objections to paying for intoxicating liquor are based on conscientious rather than economical grounds. He would not, I am sure, grudge you anything in reason."

"Look here, Mr. Maitland," she went on. "Do you call a quarter of gin or a pint of four ale after a woman's done a day's washing, reason? Not being a bigoted, pig-headed blue-ribbonite, of course you do. Well, Duddel didn't. It used to be his boast that not a drop of liquor, malt or spirituous, ever came inside our door. Much he knew about it! When a man's away at work from seven in the morning till nine at night, and even later on Saturdays, his wife has a chance to manage her own affairs in her own way. But now he's

at home every day and all day. He doesn't hand me over his dividends to keep house on, the same as he did his wages, but tells me to order what I want, and he'll draw cheques. Now you're not a married man yet, but I hear you're soon going to be, so I give you this piece of advice. If you want your wife to make you happy, don't you be too inquisitive about things that don't concern you. Duddel always was, even in the old days, and therefore I made a fool of him for his own good; but now I can't, and the consequence is we live like cat and dog. Why, in those times, if I wanted to go to a theatre, I just slipped out on a Saturday night, paid my shilling to the gallery, and was home again long before Duddel was back from the shop; but now, if ever there does happen to be a chance of an evening's amusement, I have to book a reserved seat at Lowe's, and put up with a preachment about money having given me a bankering after unlawful pleasures, when the bill comes in."

This artless revelation—I fear Mrs. Duddel had had more than one bottle of stout that afternoon—cast a new and somewhat lurid light on the fool's paradise in which Mr. Duddel had dwelt so long; but, though it was, therefore, interesting, I failed to understand why I had been privileged to listen to it.

"You'll soon see, if you're half as sharp as I take you to be," said Mrs. Duddel, when I hinted as much. "I've told you all this because I want you to put me in a position to carry on the same old game, as the song says. You do a lot of lawyer's work for Duddel, and charge him plenty for it, I'm sure. Can't you charge him a bit more and let me have the difference? If you will, I'll take care he doesn't change his solicitor; and if you won't—well, I persuaded him to come to Sawbury, and I don't doubt but what I could manage to make him leave. Anyhow, I'll try."

"My dear madam," I exclaimed, "don't you know that if I did as you suggest we should both be guilty of a criminal conspiracy?"

"I don't care what I am guilty of, so long as I get a little pocket-money," returned the lady, unabashed. "And as for you—well, being a lawyer, you're used to conspiracies, I dare say."

"But," said I, ignoring this slur on my professional rectitude, "you are quite mistaken in supposing that I have done much work for Mr. Duddel lately. Now all his money is in Consols, there is very

little to do. Most of his visits to me are of an altogether friendly nature, and, as his friend, I fear it will be my duty to inform him of the very strange proposal you have just made."

"Oh! you can tell him if you like," replied the undaunted virago. "I don't care. All I know is, I'm not going to stand this sort of life any longer. I'll have a separation first."

"A separation! The very thing!" thought I, as, after Mrs. Duddel had gone, I sat musing awhile over the peep at the seamy side of married life she had afforded me.

I felt very sorry for Duddel. He was such a simple, inoffensive, well-meaning old fellow that no one could help liking him, but his wife was already the talk of the town. Every gossip in the place knew to a bottle how much stout she drank, and to a word what she said to her husband whenever she exceeded her usual allowance. The few decent people who had at first tried to tolerate her for her husband's sake had given her up in despair, and her present acquaintances were more likely to encourage than to restrain her excesses. If she wished for a separation, Duddel, I thought, could have no possible reason for objecting to one; and the next time he poured his tale of domestic woe into my sympathetic ear, I suggested that, as he and Mrs. Duddel couldn't live peaceably together, it might be advisable to part.

"Part!" he repeated. "But, man, we're man and wife."

"Of course," said I, smiling, but as imperceptibly as possible, at his simplicity, "but you can easily afford the luxury of separate domiciles. When both are willing to do otherwise, man and wife are not bound to live under one roof."

"No," said he thoughtfully. "I suppose not. But we'd have to go before a magistrate, wouldn't we?"

"Not necessarily," I replied. "You could come to a mutual agreement, and I should draw up a deed. Of course you would have to make Mrs. Duddel a suitable allowance."

"I'd do that," he cried eagerly. "Or she could have half my Consols transferred to her name. But you must give me time to think it over."

Unfortunately for me, Mr. Duddel did not content himself with thinking over my proposal, but called at my office every day and sometimes twice a day to talk about it. As far as inclination went, he had, he

candidly confessed, no objection whatever to live apart from his wife for the rest of his days, but inclination did not go a great way with Mr. Duddel. It was thwarted at every turn by conscientious scruples, and, as far as I could read his mind, he seemed to hope I might have some arguments to advance which would remove those scruples. I did my best not to disappoint him. At interview after interview I marched whole armies of my most specious arguments against his position, but, logically indefensible though I proved it, not a scruple stirred.

Now there is something about the unreasonable uprightness of firmly-fixed conscientious scruples which irritates me, and at last I lost patience with Mr. Duddel's. If I had not been out of temper, I don't suppose I should ever have told him how utterly deluded he was in supposing that Mrs. Duddel's taste for liquor and the drama was newly acquired.

"You don't mean that!" he gasped, when I had undeceived him.

"I do," said I. "But don't take my word for it. Ask your wife herself."

"I will," said he, with a sigh. "Not that I doubt your word, but surely, surely she can't have tricked me all these years. I'd sooner believe she lied to you, Maitland."

That Mrs. Duddel would lie to me or anybody else if she had anything to gain by it I had not the least doubt; but, as I did not see what motive she could have had for doing so in this instance, I said I thought she had for once in a way spoken the truth.

"I hope not," said Mr. Duddel despondently. "It sounds a queer thing to say, but I hope not."

"Well," I replied, "I don't want to hurt your feelings, but for your sake I hope Mrs. Duddel sticks to her story."

"Why?" he asked. "Surely it's bad enough to know she's what she is now. It would kill me, I think, if I found she'd never been what I thought her."

"Not it, man," said I. "But I should think it would convince you that you are justified in letting her go her own way."

"Ay! But where would that take her?" persisted Mr. Duddel.

"Back to London, I dare say," I replied. "But what would that matter to you? We should, of course, insert in the deed the usual clause making her allowance

dependent on her leaving you free from molestation."

"Ah! I meant where would she go in a spiritual sense?" explained Mr. Duddel. "Though, after all, to a woman with money and time on her hands and no principles to guide her, London and the devil is much the same thing. However, after what you've told me, I can't decide now. I'll have a talk with poor Jane, and call again to-morrow if you don't mind."

But poor Mr. Duddel never called again. On his way home he was run over by a brewer's dray, and he succumbed to his injuries before I even heard of the accident.

"He was very anxious to see you," said the doctor who attended him. "And when we told him you had gone out of town, he gave me a message for you. I was to tell you it had been a terribly strong temptation, but that he'd prayed hard to be delivered from it, and that he died happy because he felt sure that dray was his answer. It sounds rather delirious, but I promised the poor fellow I would give you his exact words. Perhaps you can twist a meaning out of them."

Their meaning, of course, was perfectly clear to me, and, though I still think poor Duddel would have been justified in living apart from his wife—she reformed for a while after his death, but has lately relapsed, and talks of marrying a reprobate young enough to be her son—I will never again subject any client of mine to a similar temptation.

ROUND ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD.

"PAUL'S Churchyard, sir! Low archway on the carriage side." The archway is here, and it is all that is left of the Doctors' Commons that Sam Weller described. It is here to-day, this bright November morning, when the streets of the City are still showing signs of yesterday's Lord Mayor's show. But it may be gone to-morrow, even though the intention be to spare it in the great demolition now going on; for although propped up and protected by huge beams, it has a rather cranky appearance. Anyhow, to-day is ours, and we may pass under the low-browed arch into the vacancy beyond—a deep, cavernous void from which rise scaffoldings immensely tall, and platforms occupied by huge derricks and engines of various kinds, and a kind of exhalation,

composed of wafts of steam and the dust of falling buildings. And with these sights are associated all manner of strange sounds—voices from the depths, voices from the heights where the dizzy scaffolds seem to mingle with the pinnacles of Paul's, the throb of engines, the clanking of chains, the clink of trowels, and the thunder of falling materials.

Above the whole scene rise in the soft sunshine the great dome of the Cathedral, its attendant towers and pinnacles, and all the framework of the huge building, from the softly shining gilded cross among the clouds, to its base among the clods of buried generations; the upper part washed by rain-storms and bleached with sunshine, while the lower stage is as black and dingy as can be. But the whole to be seen in one marvellous coup-d'œil just for once in a lifetime; for when shall we have such a big gap again in the chevaux-de-frise that is called St. Paul's Churchyard?

A glance into the big hole, which might send a quiver through the ghost of great Sir Christopher, so closely does it approach the foundations of his mighty temple, shows at a glance a history of unnumbered centuries written in rubbish and drift. There are about twenty to thirty feet of finely pulverised London dust and rubbish, that run away like a stream down the gaping ravines of rubble beneath. And that represents the life of some twenty centuries—its buildings, its arts, its crafts, the very dust of its dead. Sir Christopher tells us how the workmen digging out the foundations of his new St. Paul's, came first upon "Saxon" graves neatly lined with chalk stones, and then deeper still to British graves, and intermixed with these, and even lower, were Roman funeral urns. But hereabouts the ground has been too frequently pulverised and disturbed to yield any valuable relics. It is just the dust and rubbish of centuries—nothing more. A black streak may represent Boadicea's fiery vengeance; a patch of ashes, the rise and fall of a new Rome. And it is all shovelled into huge cauldrons, swung away on a big derrick, and tipped into a bespattered cart that presently goes rumbling away down Carter Lane.

There is river gravel, too, great layers of it, left there by a mightier Thames than ours, and below the workmen seem to have come across a substantial clayey floor; and presently the great hole will be filled with stone and concrete, and

a huge warehouse will arise with upper windows that may look over the roof of St. Paul's.

The procession of carts down Carter Lane, loaded with the rubbish of old London, calls to mind the origin of the lane according to old Stowa. For when the Norman Bishops enclosed the precinct with a high wall, so that carts could no longer pass that way, the carters made a way for themselves just outside the wall, which soon took the name of Carter Lane. And the carters of to-day probably don't differ widely from those of mediæval times.

In a quiet corner apart from all this bustle is the old-fashioned "Deanery," that will soon be almost buried among tall warehouses; and there are still offices of an ecclesiastical character round about, and notices as to marriage licenses are posted here and there, although the touting porters in their white aprons no longer inveigle unsuspecting widowers to their doom. But the vicar-general of Canterbury has taken wing from this scene of confusion, and has settled not far off in Creed Lane, among photographers, special tea shops, and a crowd of miscellaneous traders.

Passing along the lane eastwards—where waggons are backing in upon wooden platforms, fixed on the verge of the great abyss, and cranes are hauling forth their loads of ballast, while on the other side houses, all shuttered up, await their impending doom—we reach a less agitated region at Godliman Street, which is still within the ancient precinct of St. Paul's. Here were the caputular bakehouse and brewhouse, the former still commemorated in the name of a small court upon its site. And following Godliman Street, the name of which is no testimony to the piety of the Churchmen, as might be supposed, we come upon the crowded Churchyard at the point where Cannon Street and venerable Watling Street debouch upon it. Watling Street was there before Church or Canons either—a link in the great highway of early Britain—and there is a note of antiquity, too, about Old Change, where merchants congregated what time the busy world was airing itself on the flags of Paul's Walk.

There are merchants still in Old Change. They stand at the doors of their warehouses, florid and benevolent looking. It is Saturday morning, and there is the comfortable feeling among them that it will soon be time to shut up shop. "Can you

match this, old man?" cries one who arrives hatless and breathless from an adjoining warehouse, flourishing a morsel of silk or satin pinned to a slip of paper. Bald heads and big watch-chains congregate about the morsel of silk; it is plucked at and crumpled up. Finally the dictum is pronounced, "I think Jones can do it," and the bareheaded one departs in search of Jones.

And then before we know where we are, here is Cheapside with its crowds, just by Robert Peel's statue, which looks complacently down upon the whirling streams of traffic; and successfully negotiating the crossing we attain the more tranquil purlieus of Paternoster Row. Now the Row also marks the direction of the ancient enclosure, but must have been within the wall of the precincts, and probably to begin with a row of booths, where people sold rosaries, and crucifixes, and badges or charms of various kinds, to the numerous pilgrims that flocked to the different shrines. The booksellers came afterwards, and almost in a body, from Little Britain by Bartholomew's—1720—although there were probably always sellers of religious books, and sermons, when these came into fashion, among the text-writers, the spurriers, and the lace-dealers who were there in Stowe's time and earlier. And the publishers of religious books seem to be coming to the front again in the Row, for many of the secular publishers have migrated westwards, and it even seems as if other trades were pushing their way into the booksellers' sanctuary.

If there is nothing strikingly picturesque about Paternoster Row, there are alleys and passages which open out hither and thither in a way quite unexpected and delightful. There is Cannon Alley where the Minor Canons had their dwelling of old, and which issues unexpectedly just opposite the great north door of "Pawles." Just eastward of this was Paul's Cross, where Court and City met to listen to some famous preacher, and close by was the tocsin that summoned the citizens to arms. Another alley is lined with book-shelves and second-hand books; and again another leads beneath a low-browed archway, with the glimpse of a street beyond altogether like a glimpse into another age and an earlier city. There is sunshine on the gables of the houses, that gently incline towards each other across the way; while fruit and vegetables make a sort of glow of their own in the homely, open shop-

fronts, and a few passers-by are strolling along in a quiet, leisurely way.

Another kind of city opens out from another alley; there is a snell of fustians in the air, and a broad Yorkshire accent in the directions shouted to a carman who is trundling along a bale of goods. What are Dewsbury Kidders and Dutches? Have they anything to do with kippers or cheeses? No, with rolls of carpets apparently; and now we are in Kidderminster itself, which is Brussels in another form, and Bradford looms in the horizon, and Manchester perhaps is not far off. No omnibuses come this way—only heavy lorries, and iron-bound railway carts. And everything is very quiet and still till a hansom dashes up, lurching over the cobble-stones, and Bradford rushes out, watch in hand, determined to catch the midday train for his native vale. For it is Saturday morning, remember, and people look as if they would rather miss a good order than their homeward trains.

But we are travelling too far afield, and another passage brings us back to Paternoster Square, full of all kinds of trades, and with archways that lead into other squares, through alleys and courts all quiet and silent just now; and without knowing exactly how, here we are in the paved enclosure of Stationers' Hall, with its copy-right door, where young authors sometimes plank down their half-crowns in the robust faith of getting a return for their money. And that plane-tree is still flourishing; seems to grow taller every year as if in a hopeless endeavour to see over the tops of the buildings that are being piled up round about.

Again, trusting to unknown passages, behold we are at Amen Corner, where still seems to linger the echo of a faint Amen, busy as it is just now with carts and parcels of books. But what stillness there is in Amen Court, which you enter by a great wooden gateway, with a lamp over it that must have known oil in its earlier days! A quaint row of houses with iron rails and extinguishers for the links that may not be out of date when there is a dense fog in the City, shows the residences of the Minor Canons, and there is the Cathedral Close beyond, a pleasant sort of desert bordered by a few leafless trees and shrubs, where some children are at play.

London House Yard, again, may have been the courtyard of the old Bishop's palace, and it still contains that old tavern,

the "Goose and Gridiron," to which Sir Christopher Wren resorted while St. Paul's was building, and where was held the Masonic lodge of which he was a zealous member. The sign, too, is said to be a caricature presentation of the arms of the Company of Musicians which met there at a still earlier date—"the swan that is in a double tressure," whatever that may be. In latter days there was a shilling ordinary there at one o'clock, just keeping up the traditional ordinary of St. Paul's to our own times. Tarleton, you may remember, had one in Paternoster Row, to which probably Shakespeare himself sometimes resorted. But the goose has sung its dying note, and the gridiron may be hung in the willow-tree, for the house is closed now, and probably will soon come down altogether.

Nor is there any more a Chapter coffee house, where Chatterton met all the geniuses of the day, where Goldsmith lingered and squabbled, and where Charlotte Brontë put up when she came to see her publisher in the golden days of "Jane Eyre."

And now, as we come round to the front of Paul's again to watch the busy scene of demolition which first attracted us, hark! noon is tolled out by the big clock overhead. Forthwith from the big hole clangs forth another bell, and suddenly all labour ceases. Hammers and trowels are dropped, and from the high scaffoldings tiny figures glide down to join the world below. Others are gathering up their tools and donning their outer coats, while steam is blowing off in the big cranes, and the derrick shoots its last load of buried London into the bespattered cart. The week's work is done, and nobody looks sorry. There is movement now about the shops and warehouses; a general putting up of shutters at the big establishments. Young women issue forth in groups—head saleswoman moving off arm in arm with chief milliner. For a while everybody seems to be in the streets; you might walk on people's heads in St. Paul's Churchyard and along Cheapside. Omnibusses well packed are waiting in long lines for the policeman's permissive signal, and while those are only comfortably full, trains are packed to repletion, and heavy baskets of tools, bags of angle irons and such-like trifles are rattled against the ankles of helpless passengers. It is a joyous, irresistible flight from the City, which we are bound to share.

RICHENDA.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "The Thirtieth Brydian," "Catherine Maidment's Burden," "Benefit of Clergy," "The Vicar's Aunt," etc. etc.

CHAPTER I.

It was hotter on top of the omnibus than it was inside. So, at least, thought the girl who was sitting on one of the garden seats near the back. On her left hand side was a large, heavy man, whose presence added to the heat of the May morning for her, as he encroached considerably on her share of the seat, and his shoulder interfered with the little worn sunshade which she tried perseveringly to hold between her and the sun. At length she put it down, with a little gesture of impatience. The omnibus was slowly rolling eastward along the hottest part of the Bayswater Road, towards the Marble Arch, and the sun's rays beat down on the now unprotected little figure with all their force. It was a pretty little figure, slight and well formed; and, as far as it was possible to judge while she was sitting in that cramped position in her corner, the girl was rather short. She was wearing a mauve cotton blouse and a black skirt; every detail of these, as of her gloves and her black coarse straw hat, was very precise and dainty. The black straw hat crowned a quantity of soft brown hair. There was a good deal of red in the brown, and the sun's rays had caught every red thread, and so lighted it that it looked golden. It was very wavy, curly hair. It was beautifully kept, and evidently the greatest pains had been taken to bring both waves and curls into subjection. They were neatly and tightly pinned down, and the whole was fastened up into a compact mass at the back of her pretty head. The brow over which the brown hair curled was broad and white. No lines had marked its almost childish smoothness. The face was of an oval shape, and its features were all delicately cut. The eyes were a lovely dark blue, shaded with dark lashes, and dark, delicately drawn eyebrows—the sort of eyes which, to use the Irish phrase, had been put in with "the least touch of a smutty finger." The mouth promised to be strong; but the whole face was still so young that it was difficult to say what expression time might, or might not, set upon it. Both the blue eyes and the mouth, how-

ever, at present were decidedly anxious. The pallor too, that overspread the pretty face, evidently was not due to the heat of the sun, but owed its origin to the same feeling.

She had been sitting for some time with her eyes on her closed sunshade. She raised them suddenly and looked up as if to see how far she had come. Then she took from the pocket of the black skirt a letter. It was directed to Miss R. Leicester, eighteen, Morville Square, W. She opened it and took out a short note; a note that only occupied half the first side of the sheet. She read it through, and the anxiety deepened. She glanced hurriedly at a plain little silver watch which was tucked into the front of her dress; restoring it to its place, she looked at the driver as if she longed to urge him to go faster, and finally settled herself again with her eyes firmly fixed on the gleaming white of the Marble Arch. In a few minutes more the omnibus had reached the Marble Arch and stopped. The girl gathered the sunshade and the letter up in one hand, rose, squeezed herself gently past the stolid large man, and got down. The conductor handed her on to the pavement with perhaps unnecessary care, and the omnibus rolled off, leaving her looking about her with a shade of perplexity mingled with the anxiety in her eyes.

"Twelve, Bryanston Street," she said to herself, in a pretty low voice. "I wonder which is the quickest way to it?"

She stood and considered for a moment; then she seemed to make up her mind; and turned and walked with quick, decided steps to her left. Five minutes' brisk walk brought her to Bryanston Street, and two minutes more to the door of number twelve. She went up two white steps determinedly enough, and rang the bell with a firm hand. Then her courage seemed to fail her a little, the anxiety in the blue eyes grew almost painful, and her breath came quick and fast.

"I wish it was over," she said.

She had just straightened her skirt with a nervous touch, when the door was opened by a smart parlourmaid, who stared at her from head to foot with a scrutinising, supercilious stare. A little flush came over the girl's cheeks, but her manner was quite dignified and steady, and her voice very composed as she said quietly:

"Is Mrs. Fitzgerald in? Can she see me?"

"Yes, she is in," said the parlourmaid, with a little jerk of her head that seemed to imply a decided contempt for the asker of the question. "What name shall I say?"

"Miss Leicester, please," was the answer.

The parlourmaid turned sharply round, muttering something to herself, and sailed away, leaving the pretty little figure standing lonely in the middle of the tiled entrance hall. She had not gone many steps, however, before a thought seemed to strike her.

"Come this way, please," she said over her shoulder.

Miss Leicester obeyed, and the parlourmaid led the way into a little back room, furnished with what were evidently cast off remnants from larger rooms. She shut the door and went away without a word. Miss Leicester sat down on a large, uncomfortable mahogany chair, and began to look about her.

"Oh, dear," she said with a heavy sigh. "Will all the servants be like that always, I wonder?" Then with an odd little change of tone, which made her voice sound almost as if she were speaking to another person: "Don't be so foolish, Richenda," she said. "There's no drawing back from it now; and besides, you know you haven't the smallest intention of drawing back!" And she fixed her eyes resolutely on a dim old engraving that hung opposite to her.

She was still studying it fixedly when the door opened. It was opened with a good deal of unnecessary clatter, and in some indescribable way the echoes of the clatter seemed to precede into the little room the person who was entering. This was a woman of five or six-and-thirty, not tall, or large, but rather substantially and solidly built. She was wearing a crepon gown made in exaggeration of the prevailing fashion; and her hair was dyed and dressed to correspond. Her face had evidently been pretty once; its lines were growing heavy now, but might have had a good deal of attractiveness still, if it had not been for the evident traces of the "make up" she used. On her hands, which, though white, were ill-shaped, a quantity of diamond rings sparkled as she feebly waved the large fan she held. She fixed a rather small pair of brilliant black eyes on Miss Leicester.

"You've come about the nurse's situation, I suppose?" she said.

Miss Leicester coloured.

"I had your letter to say you would see me at twelve o'clock to-day," she said diffidently.

"Oh, certainly, certainly!" was the answer. "Oh, certainly, certainly!"

Mrs. Fitzgerald's voice was not by nature musical, and education had evidently had very little chance of improving it. It was high pitched and harsh.

"Oh, yes, I told you to come at twelve, I know. It's quite right. Sit down, pray."

Miss Leicester had risen when Mrs. Fitzgerald came into the room, and was still standing. She sat down now quietly, and Mrs. Fitzgerald sank heavily and ungracefully into the chair opposite to her.

"They gave me an excellent account of you at the Training Institution," she said. "So I thought I would send for you and see for myself if you were likely to suit. How old are you?"

Mrs. Fitzgerald fanned herself vigorously as she waited for the answer to the question.

"Twenty," responded Miss Leicester.

"Twenty!" was the reflective answer. "It's scarcely old enough to manage children, I should have thought. What experience have you had?"

"Only my training," was the quiet answer.

"Only your training? I don't know that that counts for much; I don't think much of those Institutions—modern fancies, I call them. But another young woman from the same place has been so well-spoken of to me that I thought I'd try one. I don't know that I wasn't rather foolish, after all."

All this was said with so fixed a stare at Miss Leicester as to make the colour rush over her face in a great wave of crimson. Mrs. Fitzgerald regarded her angrily.

"I hope you have no affectations of that sort?" she said severely, "or you certainly won't do for me. Blushing when you are looked at is ridiculous nonsense. Do you know your duties?"

"I suppose they are all comprised in the care of the children?" Miss Leicester said.

"Yes, and you will have their clothes to make and mend. I suppose you are a good needlewoman? You would have, of course, to wash and dress them, and be with them all day long, until they go to bed at night. You would have your meals in the nursery, and you would have no cleaning to do; the nursemaid does all that. I don't give any holidays, except

one afternoon a month. Indeed, I didn't allow the last servant more than one in two months; but your matron, or whatever she is at the Training Institution, made absurd stipulations about it, so I suppose you would have to have it, though I consider it most ridiculous. The wages you ask are twenty-five pounds, I think?"

"Twenty five pounds," repeated Miss Leicester.

Something in that pretty voice, or in the face of the girl sitting opposite to her, seemed rather to irritate Mrs. Fitzgerald. Her voice grew harder and sharper with each sentence.

"I think that is all," she said. "Oh, there is one more thing. I hope you are not engaged, or won't get engaged while you are in my service? I can't and won't have any young men followers."

Miss Leicester's little mouth set itself into rather haughty lines.

"I am neither engaged, nor about to become so," she said coldly.

"That's all right! What is your Christian name? Not that I should call you by it—I should call you Leicester."

"Richenda."

"Richenda! What a frightful out of the world sort of name!"

"It is a family name," was the answer, very quietly spoken.

"Oh, indeed? I think they said at the Institution that you had no relations?"

"I have three brothers."

"Well, I can't have them about the house to see you if you come here."

"They are all at school."

"Oh! And I suppose you thought it your duty to help keep them there, eh?"

"I wish to earn my living," was the rather proudly spoken reply.

Mrs. Fitzgerald rose and took one more comprehensive look at Miss Leicester. It was the sort of look that only a woman knows how to give, a look that included every detail in her dress at once, and expressed contempt for them all.

Miss Leicester, of course, had risen also.

"You understand that you cannot dress to please yourself while you are in my service?" Mrs. Fitzgerald said. "I require the nurse to wear white all day. You will be allowed two washing dresses a week. I have made up my mind to engage you and see how it answers. I shall expect you on the twentieth. Mind you are here in good time. The other servant leaves in the morning. Good morning."

Mrs. Fitzgerald went out of the little

room with as much noise as she had entered it, and a moment or two later Miss Leicester rather hesitatingly opened the door and followed her. She looked about her for some sign of the smart parlour-maid, but there was none. The only course open to her was to let herself out. This she did, shutting the door behind her with a sigh that was smothered in the sound of its closing.

The flush that had come to her cheeks was still there as she went down the two steps into the hot sunshine again. The blue eyes were rather bright with repressed excitement, and the corners of the mouth drooped with a most contradictory depression.

"I wonder how I shall like it?" she said to herself. "She's rather dreadful! I did not think she would have treated me quite like that. But I shan't see much of her, after all, and I am glad to begin work. I hope the children will like me!"

With the last words she stopped a passing omnibus and got in.

CHAPTER II.

EVER since she had been fifteen it had been Richenda Leicester's dearest wish to "earn her living," as she had expressed it to Mrs. Fitzgerald. The wish had taken its rise in her first appreciation of the struggle which it had cost her father to make both ends of his small salary meet. Mr. Leicester had been the manager of a small branch bank in a little country town in the West of England. He had two hundred and fifty pounds a year, and a house much larger than the money could possibly keep up. His wife had died, leaving him with a boy of six; twin boys of three; and the little Richenda, who was ten. For the next few years poor Mr. Leicester's life had been a struggle with uncertain health—the little country town lay low, in a damp climate, and though he was not yet forty, chronic rheumatism had assailed him—the care of the four children, and the difficulty of managing a household which had no woman at the head of it.

The four children grew up in happy childish unconsciousness of their father's difficulties, griefs, or cares, until Richenda was fifteen. It was one day just after her birthday when, coming down late at night, unexpectedly, into the untidy dining-room to fetch a book, she found her father sitting

alone over the fire gazing desolately into its dying embers. There was something in the lonely figure which touched a hitherto quite unknown spring in the girlish heart. Very few women know the moment when they cross the dividing line between childhood and womanhood, but Richenda knew it and never forgot it. Then, in that moment, her whole position seemed changed. Instead of being the protected, the sheltered, she became, as far as her power would let her, the protector and the shelterer. She crossed the room; knelt down beside her father; and, with quick womanly sympathy, not only realised the difficulties of his life, but made him let her enter into them and share them. She had always been a loving child, and now she was a devoted daughter. She took the care of the house and of the younger children into her hands with a singleness of purpose that went as far as wider experience could have done. She threw aside the story-books of which she had been fond, and tried to work up her neglected education that she might teach the twins. By dint of great saving she made it possible for her father to send the elder boy to school.

It would be difficult to say, during the three years that followed, who had depended most upon Richenda's sympathy and help; her father or "the children," as Richenda called them. And when at the end of the three years poor Mr. Leicester died from the after effects of a violent attack of rheumatic fever, he left the three boys to Richenda's care with a smile of confidence that would have been a full reward, if Richenda had wanted one, for the devotion that had smoothed away the difficulties of his life. He was buried one cold snowy March day in the little country town churchyard, where the crocuses were just coming up through the grass; and when the funeral was over Richenda and the boys went back, a little lonely quartette, through the softly-falling snow to the great empty house which was to shelter them for so short a time longer now. They sat round the fire in their mourning dress, and talked over their plans. There was no one to advise them; no one to interfere with them. The only relative they had in the world, a cousin of their mother's, had been too old and infirm to come to the funeral, but he had done his part, nevertheless. He had written kindly, if stiffly, offering to help with the education and maintenance of the three boys, provided that Richenda could maintain herself until

such time as her brothers should be able to give her a home. Richenda had already, in her own mind, gratefully accepted his kindness. Jack, the eldest boy, whose one wish in life was to be a doctor, was to stay at the inexpensive school where his father had placed him, until he was old enough to begin his medical training. The twins, who were now eleven years old, she hoped to place at the grammar school of their native town. She was going to make arrangements for them to board with some friends who had known them all their lives, and who would be kind to them for their father's sake.

For herself her plans were equally definite. How to find out the best way of earning a living had cost the lonely girl many an hour of anxious thought. She was not, she well knew, educated enough for a governess, nor was there any special profession or trade for which she felt any aptitude. She had been almost in despair, when it occurred to her that the one pleasure of her life might be turned to account. This pleasure was the care of children. Richenda loved them as very

few girls do; and was, in return, always loved by them. In her anxious enquiries and searchings she had come across the name of an institute for training girls as children's nurses; and she decided to afford herself a year's training out of the slender fund which would be the result of the sale of such property as Mr. Leicester had possessed.

All this she told the three boys that evening. They met it as they would have met any plan of Richenda's—with the acquiescence arising from their loving belief in her. The twins gazed mournfully into the fire, and counted sadly and simultaneously the years that must pass before they could "have money enough to have Richie to live with them." Jack said nothing after his first approval. He only stood with his arm protectingly thrown round his sister's shoulders, and a thoughtful, hopeful look in his boyish eyes.

A week or two of packing up followed, and then the brothers and sister went their several ways in the world; the boys to their schools, Richenda to begin the training which had ended in her engagement by Mrs. Fitzgerald.

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PRISONERS OF SILENCE.

By MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

Author of "A Valiant Ignorance," "A Mere Cypher,"
"Cross Currents," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"I ASSURE you it is the greatest disappointment to hundreds of people that the wedding is not to be a little later in the year. If it had taken place in November, for instance, my dear Lady Karslake, it would have been quite the wedding of the year."

Mrs. Slade-Fenton finished her speech with a benignly patronising smile; and her hostess laughed slightly as she said:

"I am afraid we must plead guilty to having taken our opportunity of set purpose!"

It was not Mrs. Slade-Fenton who replied, Miss Kenderdine's voice struck in with an acerbity but thinly veiled.

"That is what everybody concludes, of course," she said with much affability of demeanour. "When a woman has been married once she is hardly likely to care to make a spectacle of herself a second time."

Lady Karslake was leaning languidly back in her chair, and she barely turned her head as she glanced round at the speaker. She was looking rather pale and tired. A month had gone by since the evening when she sat waiting for North Branstons return from Alnchester; and it had left its traces on her face, as such a month has done on the face of many another sensitive woman. Only a fortnight remained now before the wedding day; and the natural and inevitable preparations to be compressed into so short an engagement had involved no small amount

of physical as well as mental fatigue. That the engagement should be as short as might be had been almost tacitly agreed between herself and North. There was nothing to wait for. The emptiness of town was a great incentive to haste in Lady Karslake's eyes. North had taken a house immediately, and it was to be ready for them on their return from the honeymoon.

Mrs. Slade-Fenton and Miss Kenderdine had been out of town since very shortly after the announcement of North Branstons engagement; but in the interval which had preceded her departure, the former lady had opened friendly relations with the future wife of her husband's partner, and the necessity for a cordial reception of these advances had dawned upon Lady Karslake as one of the trials of her new position. She liked Mrs. Slade-Fenton less on closer acquaintance, and for Miss Kenderdine she had a vehement distaste. She fully appreciated the exigencies of the situation, and comforted herself accordingly; but an unexpected call from the two ladies, who were passing through London, was a tax on her resources which she was by no means pleased to meet. She ignored Miss Kenderdine's observation with a touch of disdain, and turned to Mrs. Slade-Fenton.

"Are you in town for long?" she said.

"Only for two days," was the answer. "A flying visit, really, but I was determined to find time to see you. We are going down to Hertfordshire, and we shall come up, of course, for the wedding, you know."

"It is very kind of you," murmured Lady Karslake politely.

She poured out a cup of tea which she made no attempt to drink.

"Oh, we would not be absent for the world," returned Mrs. Slade-Fenton suavely.

"Such an occasion, you know. You are frightfully busy, I suppose?"

"I suppose so," answered Lady Karslake with a smile.

"You have to compress a good deal into a very short time," put in Miss Kenderdine with unpleasant suggestion in her voice.

And this time Lady Karslake turned and answered her.

"You would prefer a long engagement yourself?" she said sweetly. "We shall know what to expect of you, then. Let us hope the gentleman will not be very impatient."

She looked round as she spoke with a little amused smile still on her lips. The door was opening apparently to admit another caller, and she did not catch the name announced by the servant. She rose easily and unconcernedly, and then stopped short, momentarily at a loss. To her great surprise the figure which followed the unheard name into the room was not familiar to her. It was a tall, dark, grey-haired woman, dressed in a handsome black mantle of a fashion which differed very materially from that worn by Mrs. Slade-Fenton; a heavy black bonnet, and a dark green dress. She stopped as Lady Karslake hesitated and confronted her in silence.

What there was in the gaze of the sombre black eyes that met hers that touched the chords of Lady Karslake's memory she never knew. She only realised that quite suddenly she recollected. A wave of intense surprise swept over her, and she moved forward to receive her guest with a step and bearing that were at once singularly proud and impetuous.

"Mrs. Vallotson!" she exclaimed. "What a surprise! I had no idea you were in town!"

Mrs. Vallotson's face was singularly grey in its pallor, but it was absolutely passive and more entirely self-possessed than was the sensitive face of her hostess. She did not seem to see Lady Karslake's outstretched hand, however, as she said, in a level, monotonous voice:

"I hardly expected to come. I came up yesterday."

"I am very pleased to see you," returned Lady Karslake a little haughtily. Then she moved and included her other guests in the conversation. "May I introduce you to Mrs. Slade-Fenton?" she said. "Mrs. Slade-Fenton, Mrs. Vallotson. Miss Kenderdine, Mrs. Vallotson." She paused a moment, and then added to Mrs. Slade-Fenton: "You have, of course, heard Dr. Branston speak of his sister?"

Mrs. Slade-Fenton and Miss Kenderdine had been intent and curious spectators, in spite of the studied indifference of their manner, of the unexpected arrival. With Lady Karslake's last words their interest received the stimulus of a direct point. Mrs. Slade-Fenton's knowledge of North Branston's relations had never gone beyond a vague and indifferent understanding that he had "people living at Alnchester," and the appearance of this stiff, dowdily-dressed woman awakened in her an idle curiosity.

"Of course," she said suavely, covertly surveying Mrs. Vallotson at the same time through her gold eye-glasses. "So glad to have the pleasure! Your brother and I are great friends, I assure you, Mrs. Vallotson."

Mrs. Vallotson had seated herself, erect and formal; and she had scrutinised the two elaborately-dressed figures, as Lady Karslake alluded to North Branston, with a gleam of almost sullen curiosity in her eyes. She made no attempt whatever to respond to Mrs. Slade-Fenton's overture.

"Indeed!" she said.

"You do not often leave Alnchester, I imagine," continued Mrs. Slade-Fenton patronisingly, "as I have never had the pleasure of meeting you before. No doubt this interesting occasion brings you up?"

She glanced at Lady Karslake, as she spoke, with her blandest smile. And Lady Karslake, with an impulsive, almost unconscious movement, turned her head to listen for Mrs. Vallotson's answer. It came, after a pause, curt and abrupt.

"I am in town on business," said Mrs. Vallotson.

A sense of something strange about Mrs. Vallotson's arrival, which had impressed itself on her fellow-visitor, developed into a sense of something distinctly piquant. Miss Kenderdine's lips parted into a spiteful smile as she told herself that Dr. Branston's impassible sister was not in town to add to Lady Karslake's felicity.

"You are combining business with pleasure, then," she said aloud, "for of course you will stay for your brother's wedding?"

Apparently Mrs. Vallotson did not catch the interrogative tone in which the words were spoken, for she made no reply either by word or sign. Lady Karslake was playing restlessly with a fold of her dress; she did not speak, and a dead silence ensued.

It was broken by Mrs. Slade-Fenton, who found herself obliged, in spite of her reluctance, to rise and take leave.

"So charmed to have met you!" she

said to Mrs. Vallotson, as she shook hands. "It is 'au revoir,' of course, for we shall meet at the wedding. Good-bye!"

Numerous last words to Lady Karslake followed; questions as to trousseau; playful messages to North; during which Mrs. Vallotson sat immovable. And it was only when no further pretext for lingering was to be invented that Mrs. Slade-Fenton and Miss Kenderdine finally went downstairs, leaving their hostess at liberty to shut the drawing-room door. Then with a spirited, sensitive set of her whole graceful figure, Lady Karslake crossed the room again with swift, nervous steps to where Mrs. Vallotson sat.

"Mrs. Vallotson," she said, in a low, impulsive voice, "I need not tell you that your visit is the greatest surprise to me. May I hope that it is to be a pleasant surprise?"

There was no answer. Mrs. Vallotson lifted her eyes and fixed them, as in deliberate scrutiny, on the mobile face that looked down upon her. Lady Karslake's eyes flashed a little. There had been a noticeable struggle in her words between a gracious and conciliatory intention and a hostile instinct; and the hostility developed as she continued:

"It will hardly surprise you, I imagine, that I am prepared for an alternative. You will understand, of course, that your brother has told me something of what passed between you."

The sombre eyes were watching her fixedly and mercilessly.

"What did he tell you?"

With a fierce little gesture of disdainful repudiation Lady Karslake turned away.

"I think we need not refer to the matter," she said.

Mrs. Vallotson did not press the point. Her eyes were still fastened on Lady Karslake; and a slight contraction of the lips, which should have been a smile, broke for an instant with an absolutely ghastly effect the immobility of her face.

It was Lady Karslake who broke the silence. She came swiftly up to Mrs. Vallotson's side.

"Surely," she said, and her voice had never been more winning, "surely we may forget all that is painful in the past. You have not come here, I know, to renew a useless altercation. You have come to make friends with us."

She half stretched out one hand as she finished, but almost as though in spite of herself it fell at her side again. And as

she stood waiting for an answer: her brows slightly contracted, her lips parted and tremulous: Mrs. Vallotson rose slowly. The slender figure before her was little shorter than her own powerful form, and they stood face to face.

"Why should you assume that it would be a useless altercation?"

The words came from Mrs. Vallotson in a low, grating tone, and as she heard them Lady Karslake lifted one hand in a gesture of supreme scorn. But the dark eyes seem to hold hers, and she did not turn them away.

"What else can it be?" she said, and the defiance of her voice startled her. "Your brother is free to choose for himself. He has done so. No one has either right or power to stand between him and his choice."

She saw a strange and dreadful haze fall upon the eyes into which she was looking. A moment of silence, which held in it an unutterable horror, seemed to engulf her and turn her cold, and then she heard a step on the landing and a touch on the handle of the door.

On the instant she had torn herself away from Mrs. Vallotson's gaze, and as North Branston entered the room she was by his side, clinging with nervous, almost convulsive fingers to his arm.

"Your sister has come!" she cried in an odd, uneven voice. "North, your sister."

North stopped short. Involuntarily and unconsciously his other hand closed over the trembling fingers that lay upon his arm.

"Adelaide!" he said.

"She has forgiven us," said Lady Karslake with a little excited, half-scornful laugh. "Mrs. Vallotson, isn't that so?"

Like a woman walking in her sleep, with grey shadows standing out about her mouth, Mrs. Vallotson crossed the room and turned her cheek mechanically to North Branston.

"How do you do, North?" she said.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"We seem to be at cross purposes this evening."

The words were somewhat grimly uttered, and North Branston rose, as he spoke, and walked aimlessly across the room.

It was about three hours later. With a punctilious and formal courtesy North had accompanied Mrs. Vallotson to her hotel; he had then returned to dine with Lady Karslake. The dinner itself had been a

singularly silent function. A heavy oppression seemed to rest upon North, in spite of his half involuntary attempts to throw it off. Lady Karslake was absent and fitful in humour. By neither the one nor the other was Mrs. Vallotson's visit alluded to.

Lady Karslake had opened the conversation, when North appeared in the drawing-room, by a question with reference to a detail connected with the furnishing of their house, over which they were not entirely in accord. There was a petulance in her voice eloquent of that irritability of nerves to which a subject susceptible of contradictory discussion appeals; and North, as though his own nerves were somewhat overstrung, had entered uncompromisingly into the subject. Her wilfulness had developed into unreasonableness before his unyielding conciseness of argument, and his speech as to cross purposes was the not unnatural resource of a man for whom further argument has been rendered hopelessly impossible.

The words were followed by a silence. Lady Karslake lay back in her chair, one hand thrown over her head, with the fingers tightly clenched. Quite suddenly she pulled herself up and rested her chin on her hand, as she supported her elbow on her knee.

"North," she said impulsively, and in rather a low voice, "will your sister stay in town for long?"

The instant the question passed her lips North turned to her, his face darkening. He crossed the room slowly to where she sat.

"I do not know," he said.

No tone of conciliation had come from either, the little breach between them was left untouched and ignored; but in the moment's interval that followed an effect of unity was produced. It was as though the sense of jar and strain existing in each, and previously in half unconscious opposition, had tacitly coalesced.

"Have you any notion why she came?"

"No!" He added slowly, and as if speaking rather to himself than to her: "Dr. Vallotson wished it. I heard from him a week ago."

"Perhaps he succeeded afterwards?"

North shook his head grimly.

"He has no influence whatever," he answered.

Lady Karslake moved restlessly.

"I hope she will not stay!" she said, and there was a catch in her breath. "North, why did she come?"—with a nervous insistent emphasis on the question. "Has she changed her mind?"

"I suppose so."

She glanced up at his face as he spoke the three words. A rush of faint colour tinged her cheeks, dying instantly away to leave her very pale.

"But you don't think so!" she cried. "North, what do you think? She—she means kindly, I suppose?"

"She has never meant kindly by me yet!" said North, and the words seemed to come from between his set teeth against his will.

With a gesture, half of repulsion, half of defiance, Lady Karslake sprang from her chair, and moved restlessly away. She spoke with a sudden wayward irritation.

"I don't understand you, North!" she said. "You let the thought of your sister weigh upon you in a perfectly preposterous way. If there are old scores between you that you cannot forget, you need not make a tragedy of them. I don't like it!"

As though with the utterance of his last words that strange reserve which hedged North Branstons round where Mrs. Vallotson was concerned had received some kind of indefinable shock, the preoccupation which possessed him seemed to fall away, leaving him at his hardest and most cynical. He made a slight gesture of acquiescence. Lady Karslake stopped abruptly in her rapid, aimless movements and confronted him.

"Why did you not show me Dr. Vallotson's letter—or at least tell me of it?" she demanded imperiously.

"I did not think of it," said North drily.

"You did not think of me, you mean," was the impetuous retort. "You did not care to tell me! It was not that you were indifferent to anything that concerned your relations with your sister. Do you imagine that I don't see the effect her coming has had on you? Do you imagine that you are like yourself this evening?"

"Perhaps we are neither of us quite like ourselves this evening!" retorted North grimly. "Let us hope, as you say, that Adelaide's stay in town will be a short one."

Lady Karslake laughed captiously.

"Oh, I am quite indifferent on the subject!" she said. "Why should I—?" She stopped, the colour coming and going in her cheeks. "I suppose you think I'm jealous!" she cried. "Well, perhaps I am. Why should you think so much of any woman's hostility as you do of your sister's? Why—?" She stopped again, the fire of jealousy, which she seemed to fan of deliberate impulse, died down as suddenly

as it had sprung up, and she went swiftly to him and clasped her hands tightly upon his arm.

"Oh, North!" she said in a low, uneven voice, "I hope she won't stay long—not for the tenth!"

North laughed recklessly, almost savagely.

"What does it matter?" he said.

Day after day rose and faded, bringing gradually nearer and nearer the day of the wedding, and day after day saw Lady Karslake's hopes as to Mrs. Vallotson's speedy departure still unfulfilled. Mrs. Vallotson never alluded to the wedding; she never alluded to Alnchester, or the prospect, near or distant, of her return thither. Neither did she ever speak, either to North Branston or to Lady Karslake, of any business in town or of any interests or occupation which filled her time when she was not with them. And this latter reticence on her part, isolating her as it did from any life other than their own, tended to give her solitary figure an altogether disproportionate position in their daily scheme of things. A sense of tacit compulsion pressed upon Lady Karslake; and, under its influence, hardly a day passed some hours of which were not spent by the two women together, either alone or with North. At Lady Karslake's invitation, Mrs. Vallotson lunched and dined in Wilton Street; at Lady Karslake's invitation she accompanied her on more than one visit to the dressmaker who was preparing the trousseau; and much of the shopping inevitable to that last fortnight was accomplished in her society, but wholly without comment on her part.

Day after day went by and Mrs. Vallotson's demeanour never varied. All the vigorous self-assertion, all the dictatorialness of her old manner at Alnchester seemed to have grown into an indescribable aloofness, which placed an immeasurable and icy distance between herself and the two whose society she seemed tacitly to court. She might be with them; but physical contiguity seemed to accentuate into something at times inexpressibly oppressive the barrier that lay between them. Again and again, hearing her dull, measured tones, Lady Karslake would turn restlessly and almost incoherently from the subject in hand. Again and again, lifting her eyes to meet the covert intentness of the black ones fixed, now on herself, now on North, she would rise impulsively and break up the group. After that first evening North Branston and Lady Karslake never spoke together of Mrs. Vallotson. They had, as

it seemed, more than enough to occupy their time and thoughts in the incessant difficulties with which their preparations, mutual and individual, had become suddenly rife. During that last fortnight nothing prospered with them. Arrangements fell through, or proved unsatisfactory. They were all more or less trivial difficulties, but, concentrated thus into so short a space of time, worrying to the last degree.

Nor was it on such outward circumstances only that an adverse spell seemed to rest. The relations between North and Lady Karslake during the month which had followed his return from Alnchester had been of a somewhat agitating and tumultuous character. Given a woman nervous, sensitive, and impetuous, and a man with so strangely warped a character as North's, linked together by a love self-centred and unilluminating, differing in conception on either side as the love of a man and woman must inevitably differ, and harmonised only by a central depth and reality unrealised by either, and no other result is possible. But during those four weeks the sense of strain and fret had been a background merely, an undertone in the full chord of love. With the discord which had jarred between them on the evening after Mrs. Vallotson's unexpected appearance, however, a new era seemed to be inaugurated. Their differences during that fortnight were to be numbered by their meetings. Every difficulty as it arose was the subject of a discussion more or less petulant on Lady Karslake's part, more or less cynical and uncompromising on North's part. With every day the tension obviously increased. With every day, as Mrs. Vallotson came and went, cold and immovable, Lady Karslake's irritability developed. With every day North's bitterness of manner became confirmed.

That fortnight told on Lady Karslake's physique as the previous month of her engagement had not begun to do. She grew thin and fragile-looking; her eyes grew larger and brighter; and she lost all colour.

Her appearance was commented upon by more than one of her guests when, on the night before the wedding day, Lady Karslake gave her last dinner-party. The ninth of September had come; Mrs. Vallotson was still in town. The Slade-Fentons were there and Miss Kenderdine—Mrs. Slade-Fenton demonstratively friendly to North and to Lady Karslake, elaborately

patronising to Mrs. Vallotson. There were some of Lady Karslake's relations, not enthusiastic but eminently amiable; and there was Archdeacon French, quiet, cordial, and rather intently observant, as the evening wore on, both of his hostess and of North Branston. For the evening was not a success. Whether the shadow that gradually filled the pretty room really emanated from the sombre woman's presence, which seemed to Lady Karslake's overwrought imagination the very centre on which the function turned; whether it emanated from North Branston, who seemed to be fighting an inexplicable depression with his grimmest front; or whether its source was the hostess herself, growing whiter, more silent, and more absent-minded as the time wore on; it would have been difficult to say. But by ten o'clock it was being confidentially murmured among the guests that Lady Karslake was worn out, and that it would be only kind to stand between her and rest for as short a time as possible. And by half-past ten nearly every one had gone. Mrs. Vallotson and the Slade-Fentons' party — which included Archdeacon French — were the last to take leave; and Lady Karslake passed from Mrs. Vallotson's cold touch of the hand to Mrs. Slade-Fenton's effusive auguries for the morrow, with her lips a little compressed. The last to wish her good night was Archdeacon French. He took the hand she held out to him and looked at her keenly and gently.

"Good night, Lady Karslake," he said. "You will rest when to-morrow is over!"

She smiled at him faintly, and then, as he left the room, she let her forehead fall gently on her hand as it rested on the mantelpiece. For the moment she was alone; North had gone to the door with the last departures, and she stood quite motionless, the lace on her dress moving softly as though she trembled. The front door closed; North's step came slowly up the stairs; and, as he entered the room, she lifted her head.

North paused in the doorway, and looked at her uncertainly. He was very pale.

"May I stay for a few minutes?" he said hesitatingly.

"Yes!"

He came in and stood on the opposite side of the fireplace, looking at her heavily. For nearly a moment neither spoke. Then with a swift impetuous movement she stretched out both her hands to him, and he caught them desperately in his own.

"North," she said hurriedly, "North,

what have we been doing for the last fortnight? Why have we made one another so wretched?"

The grip in which he held her hands must have been painful at any other time, but now she was unconscious of any physical sensation. Her eyes shone with a light that was half beseeching, half self-surrender.

He watched her for a moment, and his face twitched painfully.

"Have I made you wretched?" he said.

"I have made myself wretched! We have made one another wretched!" was the quick answer. "Ah, North, how can we? I've been thinking of it all the evening—I've thought of it often when I've been most detestable! How can we! Look, dearest"—her rapid speech trembled with a growing tenderness—"to-night let us put it all away. All that we've quarrelled over, all that has fretted us! We love each other, and love goes deeper than we can understand — means more than we can realise! Let us make our stand on that!"

"We love each other!" he said hoarsely. He was holding her hands crushed against his breast, looking into her eyes as though they held his very life. "Eve, do you know what you mean when you say that? Do you know what a brute I am—how hard and ungenerous I can be? Do you know that I'm scarred, that there are marks in my life that can never—"

She drew one hand swiftly away and placed it on his lips, but if she turned a little paler, the only change that came to her eyes was a deepening of their light.

"Hush!" she said softly, "that's put away. Your life is mine to-morrow; your scars are mine. Ah, if we come to questions, it is I who should say, can you love me now that you see me as I am, wilful, unreasonable, capricious? Ah, North, can you?"

"Don't you know?"

She paused a moment, meeting his eyes, the necklace at her throat rising and falling rapidly.

"Yes," she said, a sweetness new to it in her voice. "I know! I know that all our lives, with each their pains and disappointments, have been worth living because they led to this! I know that from to-morrow this is our whole existence. I know that having this we have what nothing can take from us, nothing destroy, and through which nothing can touch us. North, are you happy?"

Still with his eyes on hers, and with the bitter lines in his face merging into some-

thing infinitely stronger and finer, he drew her slowly into his arms, and their lips met in a long kiss.

MADURA.

THE stately city of Madura, as a centre of religion and learning, was for many centuries the Oxford and Canterbury of Southern India; and although the glory of the ancient metropolis has passed away, the extensive ruins of the Tirumala Palace and the huge Temple of Siva remain as monumental memorials of former renown. The Dravidian architecture of the Madras Presidency attains the climax of perfection in Madura, where the pyramidal sanctuary reaches the highest Indian development; and in the clustering shrines and temples comprised in the great Pagoda, which covers an area of twenty acres, we find the masterpieces of the fantastic style known as Indo-Chinese. The Dravidian races offered the labours of their lives to the gods, sparing neither toil nor cost in the generous devotion which frequently shames the apathetic disciples of a purer creed. The construction of a Dravidian pagoda always includes five characteristic features amid considerable variety of detail and design.

The Vimana, or Adytum, corresponds with the chancel of a Christian church, and contains the altar and image of the tutelary deity beneath the gilded pyramidal roof of a dark cubical cell, where an ever-burning lamp glows like a red star through the mysterious gloom. Huge sculptured porches known as Mantapas approach the Vimana from the four points of the compass, and typify the universal claims of religion on the human heart. The Gopuras, or Gate Pyramids, encrusted with grotesque carving, tower up in diminishing storeys to the height of two hundred feet, and terminate in an oblong dome. These colossal cones, encrusted with the polytheistic legends of Indian theology translated into stone, form the most conspicuous attributes of the Southern Temple. Another inseparable adjunct to the labyrinth of architecture is found in the pillared hall, or choultry, containing a thousand columns elaborately carved from base to capital, or shaped into caryatides supporting the massive stone roof. Sacred tanks for the purification of the worshippers reflect the maze of pillars in a silvery mirror framed by a cloistered colonnade, from whence broad flights of marble steps descend to the water's edge.

The labyrinth of vaulted porches, pillared aisles, and soaring pyramids leads up on every side to the central Adytum, revered as the shrine of divinity, and consequently the sanctum sanctorum of the enormous composite erection known as a pagoda. Nine pyramidal towers enhance the splendour and dignity of the mighty Pagoda of Madura. This historic temple dates from the third century B.C., and was dedicated partly to Minakshi, "the fish-eyed goddess," and partly to Siva the Destroyer, the popular deity of the Hindu Triad, whose name of terror is ever on the lips of the multitude, swayed by the frenzied fear of divine vengeance which acts as the motive power of devotion. In A.D. 1324 the ancient Pagoda was destroyed, but in less than two hundred years was restored to its pristine grandeur, and afterwards kept in complete repair, though the colossal size of the complex structure necessitates the perpetual labour of numerous workmen engaged for the purpose. The debased and soulless architectural style is alike devoid of mental aspiration and spiritual beauty, the crowding deities sculptured on the gigantic pile are of the earth earthy, the divine element is absent, and the degradation of the human type suggests nothing but the animalism of a materialistic creed moulded into the rigid solidity expressed by these elaborate monuments. Faith has fallen from the high ideals which probably inspired the founders of every historic religion, and the heaven of truth which alone vitalises a theological system proves powerless beneath the dead weight of stony accretion accumulated above it. The coup d'œil of the great Pagoda as it towers up in dazzling magnificence to the burning blue of the Indian sky possesses an impressive though barbaric dignity. The elaborate groups of sculpture beneath the bristling pinnacles of every aerial gallery glow with vivid tints of scarlet, yellow, purple, blue, and green, in manifold gradations of tone, and the polished surface of the stained chunam, composed of shells pounded in cocoanut water, and stuccoed upon the stonework, resembles the lustrous Oriental porcelain which retains the brilliancy of the powdered jewels used in the costly glazing of some masterpiece of ceramic art. The development of that complex Puranic mythology which for more than two thousand years has swayed the religious thought of India, may be compared to one of those mighty Indian rivers which issues in a crystal rill from the eternal snows, but expands into a

turbid flood as it receives the waters of a hundred tributary streams, and sweeps onward in a swelling tide, bearing with it a host of alien influences, to the distant sea. Indian civilisation, built up through thirty centuries by the hands of successive races, was alike unique in architecture, religion, literature, science, social life, and legislation. Problems were solved in ancient India which were unexplained mysteries in Europe until the close of the seventeenth century. The mystic East was not only the cradle of humanity but the birthplace of scientific thought, and the infinite patience of the Oriental mind first unravelled the tangled threads of those mysteries which surrounded the path of life, revealing their existence to the thoughtful soul like occasional lightning flashes from a shadowy cloud.

In the eighth century B.C. India had discovered the elementary laws of geometry and imparted them to Greece, while the application of algebra to astronomical investigations and to geometrical demonstrations was a peculiar invention of the subtle Hindu genius. Though many just and humane laws became obsolete, or were altered for the worse, religion in one form or another dominated the public and private life of India from the earliest period, and the early Vedic Hymns, which form the noblest element in Hindu theology, breathe the aroma of peace and purity belonging to the dawn of history, before the dewy freshness faded in the garish noon when the sacred literature became saturated with grotesque fables and profane songs, demoralising national religion and giving it a retrogressive movement.

Passing under the majestic Gopuras of Madura we enter a maze of dusky corridors used as bazaars, and lighted up with the brilliant colouring of exquisite scarves and turbans in diaphanous gauze striped with gold and silver. This beautiful fabric, peculiar to the city, is sold for the benefit of the Temple, but the riotous and fanatical crowd of Shivaïtes, distinguished by three white horizontal lines on the forehead, shortens the tour of inspection, and we hurry onward to the gloomy Choultry supported by a thousand richly carved pillars of red stone and black granite. Entire columns are hewn into the representations of male and female figures, and one huge shaft which forms the statue of a dancing girl is a chef-d'œuvre of realistic expression, the flying feet scarcely seeming to touch the marble pavement and the tossing arms instinct with life and motion. Another

pillar represents a demon, and boys are enjoined by a tablet overhead to spit in his face, by way of inculcating a holy horror of diabolical influences. One colossal column, subdivided into twenty-four aerial shafts with infinite grace and lightness, stands at the entrance of an arched colonnade built by King Tirumala, and gigantic images of the monster-lion of the South face a sacred tank. Brahmins are bathing in the green water with symbolical rites and offerings, and a poor old woman descends the granite steps of the surrounding cloister, praying aloud that the healing waters may cleanse her soul from sin and render her acceptable in the sight of God.

With every confession of her transgressions she pours the sacred drops over her unveiled head, her thin grey hair streaming over her emaciated shoulders. North, south, east, and west she scatters the precious element, typifying the boundless mercy of the deity, and showing by this ritual act that germs of truth still linger in the ancient creed which buries them beneath an ever-increasing mountain of superstition. Frescoes of mysterious astronomical figures line the grey cloister which surrounds the tank, and alternate with coarse representations which show not only the debasement of archaic art, but the still greater corruption of the popular mind. Before the shrine stand three colossal images of the sacred bull, the chosen emblem of Siva, whose weird statue, adorned with chains of gold and mystic jewels, gleams from a dim recess at the end of a shadowy aisle where the sacred lamp glows through the brooding darkness. An oppressive stillness lingers round the haunted spot dedicated to the divine "Destroyer." The benignant deities of Hindu theology receive but cold and careless homage, while, through the strange inversion of a creed sunk to the lowest depths of debasement, the utmost enthusiasm of devotion is lavished upon the gods of wrath, pain, and death, in the hope of propitiating their anger and diverting their vengeance.

A line of hideous images smeared with oil and red ochre forms a portico containing the gilded and painted car in which the sacred statue of Siva makes the progress of the city on State occasions, amid the plaudits of the multitude, the shrieks of devotees, and the wailing of the conch-shells, as they pierce the air with the shrill notes which mingle with the thundering trombones and thrumming sitars of the Temple band. The Palace of Tirumala, now

in ruins, was built by one of the greatest provincial rulers in A.D. 1623, and contains a superb quadrangular hall two hundred and fifty feet long, flanked by massive granite columns stuccoed with chunam. Though less than three centuries have elapsed since the erection of this labyrinthine edifice, it has already fallen into the absolute decay which speedily overtakes every Indian building unless kept in perpetual repair.

The fierce burst of the monsoon, the blinding clouds of dust, and the raging heat of the blistering sun, which combine to wreck every structure built by human hands, have wrought dire havoc on the Tirumala Palace, although the British Government has sufficiently restored a portion of the vast fabric to render it available for legal purposes.

Weary alike of pagoda and palace, with their intricate labyrinths of cloisters, halls, and corridors thronged by historic and religious associations still more confused and bewildering, we quit the wilderness of stone and marble for the green avenue of mango trees which leads to the consecrated tank of Tippu-Kulam. A soft breeze ruffles the blue water which is seen through a dark vista of arching banyans, and stirs the feathery palms of a temple-crowned island in the centre of the lake. The silence and solitude of the peaceful scene afford a welcome relief to the jaded wanderers, after the noise, dust, and tumult of fanatical Madura.

The expedition is prolonged by a visit to the abode of the English Collector, who inhabits a stately mansion in a verdant park adorned by a celebrated banyan tree, which, by striking root from the stem growing downwards from the end of every branch, forms a long aisle of dense foliage. The representative of Government in this southern district occupies a princely position, and presides over a "zillah" as large as many an English county. The great British official, separated by an impassable gulf from native life, is regarded with reverential awe by his Oriental fellow-subjects, to whom he appears an incomprehensible being, inaccessible and irresistible. The Collector and his staff are rarely acquainted with the vernacular, and at present labour under a serious disadvantage, which will probably find a remedy in the more practical education of the future, as regards the tenure of an office with a stipend of three thousand pounds per annum, and a subsequent pension of one thousand pounds.

Madura, as the religious capital of Southern India, is the residence of the High Priest of Siva, a Brahmin of the purest caste, who acts as the Metropolitan of his order in the Madras Presidency. Vishnavism and Sivaism being the heart and soul of religion in the South, Brahma, the original creator of gods and men, has fallen into the background of the theological system, and only receives worship in the person of his alleged offspring, the Brahmins. Dr. Monier Williams points out the distinction between Brahminism and Hinduism, explaining the former as "the purely pantheistic and not necessarily idolatrous creed evolved from the religion of Vedas, which reflects the early faith of mankind as a worship of the beneficent powers of Nature." The same authority designates Hinduism as "a complicated system of polytheism, superstition, and caste, developed out of Brahminism after contact with the non-Aryan creeds of the Dravidians and aboriginal races of Southern India." Thus Brahminism and Hinduism, though differing from each other, are integral parts of the same system. The one is the germ or root of the tree, and the other the rank and luxuriant outgrowth. The temples of Madura, which surpass those of Benares in splendour as far as the great basilica of St. Peter's eclipses a village church, are the results of the frantic outburst of superstitious terror which attributes to the god Siva the control of demoniacal agencies and the possession of their savage and malignant qualities in the person of his own wife, a gruesome divinity known as "black Kali." On the reception day of Brahma's earthly representative, the High Priest of Siva, we obtain the supposed privilege of an introduction through a mutual acquaintance. The carriage of the Collector is just driving away from the Brahminical Palace as we approach the arched gateway, surrounded by a picturesque group of brown figures scantily clad in snowy scarf and turban, and bearing umbrellas of scarlet silk striped and fringed with gold, peacocks' fans glancing with prismatic radiance in the brilliant sunshine, and grotesque banners of yellow satin and glistening foil. As we descend from the carriage two muslin-robed attendants advance with profound salaams to strew roses, jasmine, and aromatic herbs before us as we mount the marble steps and enter a dusky vestibule with richly gilded ceiling, and walls covered with a many-coloured mosaic of glittering tinsel. In an alcove at the end of the long hall a weird

image of Siva looms above an altar covered with twinkling tapers. A richly-dressed Chamberlain, wearing a golden chain of office, marshals us with a wand up a long flight of stone stairs to a saloon draped in white within a colonnade of open arches. A grass matting conceals an inner chamber into which our conductor advances, and after a short delay the curtain is raised and we are admitted into the presence of the great man, who lolls in a large white arm-chair with his corpulent brown figure airily attired in a couple of yellow scarves and a string of black beads. His piercing dark eyes denote keen intelligence, and express unbounded amusement with a soupçon of contempt for the travellers "from beyond the black water" which those of Brahmin caste are forbidden to cross. The unwieldy stoutness of the great Tamil ecclesiastic is attributed by his admirers to a passion for the sugar-candy which apparently forms the staple article of his priestly diet; but a vague sense of disappointment steals over us at the absence of those characteristics which imagination suggests as appropriate to one who enjoys the reputation of a prophet and seer, and who numbers his disciples by thousands in every part of India. Our preconceived ideas of the sacerdotal character are wholly dispelled, and a prophet engaged in steadily laying the foundation of a sixth choir proves too severe a test for our feeble faith, which fails in the presence of this rollicking celebrity, devoured with childish curiosity, and inflated by the sense of his own supreme importance. A grave young Brahmin waves a feather fan over the shaven pate of his spiritual superior; the secretary, who acts as interpreter, stands on the right, and the Chamberlain on the left, their parti-coloured garb accentuating the enormous "study in brown," who exhibits himself before us with the utmost nonchalance. After a few introductory civilities, and numerous questions through the interpreter as to "the great white Empress" beyond the seas, the High Priest throws a huge wreath of yellow marigolds and pink oleanders round my neck, and presents my companion with a packet of sugar-candy, which is evidently considered more worthy of a man's acceptance than the decoration with which the feminine visitors are invested. A bundle of photographs is then produced, and the high-sounding name of Tryganya Sambandha written upon one of them in Sanskrit character before the High Priest places the quaint souvenir in my hand. The same sketchy costume is

delineated in the picture as that which he sports on the present occasion, but the negligent attitude is exchanged for one more befitting the dignity of a high-caste Brahmin, and Siva's representative sits cross-legged on an embroidered divan, with one hand raised in the act of benediction, and a countenance of portentous solemnity. The present of the photograph is a special mark of favour, and concludes the little drama; but, as we retire backwards behind the Chamberlain, the great man makes a sudden dash forward, regardless of dignity, and gives us a violent shake of the hand in what he fondly supposes to be the orthodox English fashion. Our crushed and tingling fingers retain the recollection of this barbaric grasp for the remainder of the day, but our desire for an audience is satisfied, and "il faut souffrir" applies to our ambitions as well as to our personal appearance.

In the roseate dawn of a cloudless day we bid farewell to Madura as the crowds of worshippers wend their way to the towering Pagoda to join in the "pooja," or sacrifice, offered in the Temple courts. The comparative success of Roman Catholic missions in India is explained by even a cursory study of Hindu doctrine and practice. Processions, images and relics, fast and festival, prayers for the dead, and commemorations of the saints form integral parts of every historic Eastern creed, and a Church which systematises and upholds the familiar observances of the native races, while raising the level of faith and devotion, of necessity obtains a stronger hold on Indian hearts than the communions which discard or relax familiar rites engraved indelibly on the conservative native mind. The complex influences of the past have welded the heavy yoke of caste and superstition into an iron rigidity, and although the power of Christian charity and the influence of social example can never be wholly unavailing, the Titanic task of missionary enterprise frequently appears but a hopeless attempt to remove a mountain of difficulty, which rolls back to crush the weary labourer beneath a dead weight of failure and despair.

SOME OPTICAL PHENOMENA.

THE normal human eye does not fulfil all the requirements of a perfect optical instrument, but its imperfections in this respect do not interfere with its practical use as the chief and most delicate of the sensory

organs by which knowledge of the outside world is obtained. Among civilised peoples, however, the proportion of perfectly normal eyes is said to be steadily diminishing, owing to various causes—in some countries at an alarming rate. It has been stated, on good authority, that there are comparatively few people who have the sight of both eyes equal; and, strange to say, many of those who are thus affected have been unaware of this condition until it has been revealed to them by accident. More people than one would at first sight suppose are unable to shut one eye and keep the other open at the same time (though this is more common with children than with adults) and thus any inequality in the seeing power of their eyes may escape notice, though they may for years have been practically seeing with one eye only.

Sir John Herschel noted a case of a person who by chance made the unpleasant discovery, late in life, that he was altogether blind in one eye. One gentleman, describing his own case in "Nature," said that while he could see with his right eye figures five-eighths of an inch high on the face of a clock at a distance of twelve feet, he could not see them with his left eye further away than eight inches; yet he was ignorant of this remarkable discrepancy until he had reached middle age. The eyes of individuals also differ frequently in their sensitiveness to colour and to light, so that it is, in fact, the exception rather than the rule to find a pair of eyes which are perfectly equal in all respects.

One of the most curious of the observations which have been made on the eye is the detection of the various reflected images which are formed in it, in addition to the refracted image which serves the purposes of vision. In its passage into the eye each ray of light passes through the cornea, the aqueous humour, the crystalline lens, and the vitreous humour before finally reaching the retina, and is liable to be partially reflected at the surface of each of these four parts, giving rise to four separate reflected images. These were all seen and described by Purkinje at the beginning of this century, but Helmholtz and others succeeded in observing three only, which can be easily seen by two persons on holding a lighted match between their eyes, and moving it about so that the reflections appear to come from the pupil. One of these images, that reflected by the front of the cornea, is much brighter than the two others, which are formed by the front sur-

faces of the crystalline lens and the vitreous humour respectively. The fourth image, which is due to reflection from the posterior surface of the cornea, may be detected by careful examination of the brightest image by means of a magnifying-glass. Helmholtz failed to detect it, as the images reflected from both surfaces of the cornea coincide at the centre of the pupil, but when the brightest image is brought near to the border of the pupil, and especially when it passes on to the iris, it is seen to be accompanied by a small, pale, but well-defined image lying between it and the centre of the pupil. Besides these primary reflections, the light, reflected from any of the internal surfaces, may be again reflected, and though it is exceedingly faint, it is capable of giving rise to two light impressions due to double reflection, and one of these—caused by rays which have undergone, besides several refractions, two reflections, one at the posterior surface of the crystalline lens, and one at the anterior surface of the cornea—has been actually observed in the human eye.

The automatic contraction of the pupil in bright light and its expansion in faint light have been found to be to some extent under the control of the will. One observer has found that when facing a bright light he can make his pupils expand or contract at the desire of any one looking into his eyes. The pupil contracts while he steadily looks at the bright light, and when he desires to expand it, he takes his attention away from the eye without moving it, and fixes it on some other part of his body, in some such way as by biting his tongue or pinching his arm. This counter stimulus diminishes the sensitiveness of the retina, and the pupil dilates, contracting again when the mind is recalled to the eye and the light.

Often the sudden presentation of an idea or an image to the intellect is accompanied by a distinct and sometimes a powerful sensation of luminosity in the eye, which may be intense enough to be observable even in broad daylight. Helmholtz showed that the interior of the eye is itself luminous, and he was able to see the movement of his arm in total darkness by the light of his own eye. Professor Tesla has characterised this experiment as one of the most remarkable recorded in the history of science, and he says that there are probably very few men who could satisfactorily repeat it, as such a degree of luminosity in the eye can only be found associated with

uncommon activity of the brain and great imaginative power. It may be looked on as a sort of fluorescence of brain action.

The sympathy existing between the eyes, which operates so that any serious injury to the one is almost certain to affect the other, necessitating the removal of the injured eye in order to save the other, has been shown by Dr. Chauveau to extend so far that a colour perceived by one eye excites the retina of the other. This may be demonstrated by the common experiment of looking at a white surface for a short time through coloured glass with one eye, while the other is covered, when it is well known that if the coloured glass is removed, the white ground appears tinted with the complementary colour; but if the first eye is closed and the second opened, the white surface appears tinted with the same colour as the glass.

A remarkable instance of the resuscitation of an optical image was experienced some time ago by Professor T. Vignoli. He says, that after a railway journey in bright sunshine and two days' walking in a suffocating heat, he happened to be in a room with several other persons, and in the course of the conversation he looked at a balcony bathed in the bright morning sunlight, casually, and without taking any particular note of it. The balcony was decorated with trellis work, ivy, and flowering creepers, while a cage containing birds swung in the middle. Two days afterwards, early in the morning, whilst still in bed, but perfectly awake and in ordinary health, he was astonished to see on the ceiling, by the light coming through the Venetian blinds of two large windows, an exact reproduction, in all its details and colours, of the balcony referred to, so complete that even the swinging motion of the birdcage was perceived. The phenomenon lasted long enough to permit of some detailed examination. The image was found to disappear when the eyes were closed and reappear when they were opened. It was unaffected by closing each eye alternately, and a finger placed before the eye intercepted it in the same way as any ordinary object. Professor Vignoli regards the appearance as an outward projection of a recollected image by some obscure mechanism, and not as an ordinary case of hallucination, as then the image would have been unaffected by opening and closing the eyes, and such appearances only occur during ill health or a disturbed state of mind.

Professor Chauveau has described a curious phenomenon of colour sensation. He says, that if one goes to sleep on a seat placed obliquely in front of a window which allows light from white clouds to fall equally on both eyes, the coloured objects in a room appear illuminated by a bright green light during a very short interval when the eyelids are opened at the moment of awaking, but the phenomenon is not observed except when the awaking is from a profound slumber. He concludes that this may be taken as a proof that there are in the visual apparatus distinct perceptive centres for green, and probably also for violet and red, and of these the centres which perceive green first regain their activity on awaking.

When coloured objects are brightly illuminated by a very strong light they appear white, as they absorb so small a proportion of the light from any particular portion of the spectrum, that the maximum effect of that portion is not appreciably diminished, and the rest of the spectrum can do no more than give out its maximum effect, so that the eye is affected equally by all parts of the spectrum, and the resulting sensation is white.

It has also been noted that when the light is very feeble, all objects appear devoid of colour. Captain Abney, in a recent lecture at the Royal Institution, illustrated this by a picturesque description of the appearances presented by a Swiss mountain scene in the early morning. When the light is just sufficient to show the outline of the mountains, the tufts of grass and the flowers along the path are still indistinguishable, and almost everything appears of a cold grey tint, quite devoid of colour. A little more light, and some flowers among the grass appear a brighter grey, while the grass itself remains dark. The mountains show no colour, and the sky looks leaden. Presently the sky begins to blush in the direction of the approaching sunrise, the rest being of a blue-grey. Blue flowers are now seen to be blue, and white ones white, but violet or lavender-coloured ones still appear of no particular colour, and the grass looks a greyish green. When the sun is near rising the white peaks are tipped with rose, and every colour becomes distinct, though still dull, and finally full daylight comes, and the cold grey tones give place to the familiar warmth of hue.

At home, in the gloaming of an autumn evening, the gorgeous hues of garden flowers

assume a very different aspect. Red flowers appear dull and black, blue and the brightest pale yellow appear whitish-grey, and the grass and the green of the trees become of a nondescript grey hue. By moonlight, when daylight has entirely disappeared, a similar kind of colouring takes the place of the variety of broad day. Moonlight, too, passing through the painted glass windows of a church or cathedral, throws a perfectly colourless pattern on the grey stones of the floor. A bunch of flowers placed in a beam of electric light shows every colour, but when the light is gradually dimmed down the reds disappear, while blue remains distinct, and green leaves become dark. Captain Abney's further investigations on this subject show that the intensity of every colour may be so far reduced that nothing but a sort of steel grey remains before final extinction. With equal luminosities, violet, which disappears last, requires one hundred and seventy-five times more reduction to extinguish it than red, and probably about twenty-five times as much as green.

This point may be pursued in another direction. When any suitable body is sufficiently heated, it begins to glow, and it is usual to name the stages of the progress in increase of temperature as black, red, yellow, and white heat, but, following up his researches on feeble light, Captain Abney has shown that there is an intermediate stage between black and red, and that the first visible radiation from a hot body is a dim grey; and similarly, Mr. P. L. Gray, in a paper read before the Physical Society on the minimum temperature of visibility, stated that the platinum strip, raised to incandescence in his experiments by the electric current, at the lowest temperature at which anything was seen at all, had to most observers no appearance of red heat, but looked like a whitish mist. Weber has also shown that the first light which becomes visible when a solid body is heated is not dark red, but grey, which shows itself in the spectroscopie as a band in the yellow-green region.

Professor Langley says that the time required for the distinct perception of an extremely faint light is half a second, and that, relatively, a very long time is needed for recovery of sensitiveness after exposure to a bright light; the time demanded for complete restoration of visual power being greatest when the light to be perceived is of a violet colour. This corresponds with Captain Abney's observations as to the relative feebleness of violet light when

dimmed down to the extreme of visibility. M. Charles Henry, of the French Academy of Sciences, in his researches on the minimum perceptible amount of light, by the aid of his photometer, in which he utilises the phosphorescent properties of zinc sulphide, has shown that if the eye is previously kept in the dark during varying periods, the smallest amount of light it can detect varies inversely as the square of the time during which it has been rested in the dark.

When the eye has been fatigued by long exposure to any colour, it first recovers sensitiveness to the complementary colour, and recovers last the perception of the colour by which the fatigue has been caused, while the most sensitive part of the retina—the "fovea," or yellow spot—takes longest to recover from colour fatigue.

Professor König has estimated the total number of distinct differences in tint which a normal eye can discriminate from the red to the blue end of the spectrum at one hundred and sixty-five, and he has further determined the number of differences of brightness which can be discriminated, starting with light which is barely perceptible and increasing up to a blinding intensity, to be six hundred and fifty. Calculating from these data, and taking into account the fact that as the intensity of light diminishes, so does the number of clearly perceptible differences of tint, he puts the total number of possible visual differences which can be perceived in a spectrum, in round numbers, at fifty-six thousand. Commenting on this calculation, Professor Bezold suggests that by using complementary colours, it may be possible to discriminate a much larger number of tints, since it is well known that two colours which are indistinguishable when compared directly, often give quite different complementary colours, and can thus be distinguished.

When a black disc with one quarter of its surface painted white, revolving once in two seconds, is illuminated by a very bright light, while the observer's eye is fixed on the centre of the disc, a narrow black sector appears on the white quadrant near the receding edge of the black portion of the disc. Its breadth is equal to that of the white interval between it and the receding black border, and these breadths increase and diminish in width as the speed of revolution of the disc is increased or diminished. This appearance is supposed by Charpentier to indicate the existence in the visual appa-

ratus of some sort of rebound, or oscillatory effect, with a period of from thirty-one to thirty-six per second. The arrival of the white border causes a sensation of white, which is followed by an after effect, or a brief period of insensibility to luminous impressions. The experiment is very striking in a strong light, and may be roughly demonstrated by a black and white disc turned slowly by hand, or a black and white card moved horizontally before the eyes.

Another very striking experiment described by Charpentier is performed by revolving a black disc, with open sectors, between the eye and a white sheet illuminated by direct sunlight, which gives rise to the sensation of a magnificent purple colour when the rate of revolution is such that the eye receives between forty and sixty impulses per second, so that each stimulus occurs during the rebound from the one preceding it. In this connection mention may be made of Benham's "Artificial Spectrum Top," which has recently been put on the market. This remarkable scientific toy consists of a disc, one half of which is black, while the other half is white, marked with concentric circles of different lengths in black. When the disc is revolved the impression of concentric circles of different colours is produced upon the retina, and if the direction of rotation is reversed the order of these tints is also reversed.

A peculiar optical illusion is described by M. Bourdon in the "*Revue Philosophique*." When the eye is kept fixed, an object which moves before it undergoes, on passing from direct to indirect vision, a certain degree of obscuration or change of coloration, and the opposite effect is seen when it comes into the field of direct vision. It is natural to suppose that this effect plays some part in the perception of motion, and one fact proving this is that if we render a slowly moving object suddenly invisible, as, for instance, by means of a shadow, its velocity of motion seems much increased.

If a pendulum is supported by a white thread and illuminated by a bright light, while a screen is arranged to cast a shadow which renders the thread invisible during part of the swing of the pendulum, each time it enters into the shadow the speed with which it is moving appears to be considerably increased, and it seems as if it were attracted into the shadow, while on its return swing it appears to enter the light with a sudden shock. With a red supporting thread the illusion also occurs, but not quite so markedly.

SOME SO-CALLED AMERICANISMS.

WE are accustomed to hear of Americanisms as of something altogether different from the Queen's English, but a little examination of current words and phrases will show that many so-called Americanisms are merely transplanted English provincialisms. Many an expression that seems to us "so Yankee" was probably carried across in the "*Mayflower*." We are, indeed, too apt to forget the English origin of the genuine Yankee—or New Englander—so that we receive back with surprise as foreign products what are really of our own exportation. No doubt the American neologist owes much to Indian associations, to mixed immigration, and to the new habits of a new land, but a very large proportion of reputed Americanisms originated in the Mother Country. And, Americanisms apart, the educated American speaks the English language as correctly as the native-born Briton. The average American may have a somewhat pronounced, or distinctive, accent; but is it more un-English than the differing accents of even the best educated people of our own provincial towns, or of the genuine Londoner?

America, of course, is a wide term, stretching from the Arctic to the Tropic regions, and local peculiarities are not to be classed comprehensively as Americanisms. What is usually meant by an Americanism is a mode of expression varying from the standard of good English, and prevalent throughout America. A somewhat wider definition is given in an American Encyclopædia: "In works by American writers many words may be found which are not their invention, but are taken from popular use, and which are either unknown to Englishmen, or are used by them in a different sense. These terms are occasionally really new words fashioned in a new country to represent new ideas or to name new tools; or they are old English roots which have sent up suckers full of new meaning, though still bearing the image of the parent stock. To these must be added words of foreign tongues which the English of the Americans has adopted and amalgamated with its own stock." Further: "It will be seen that the number of true Americanisms is, after all, very small, and many of these even will, upon careful investigation, be found to be either revivals of obsolete words or imitations of well-known terms."

We propose to pick out a few examples

in order to correct some current fallacies about current Americanisms, but we shall not attempt any philological disquisition unsuited to these pages.

"About right," as a synonym for well or thorough, is not peculiar to America. We have met with it frequently in many parts of England, not as an importation but as a native expression.

"Skeets" for skates is supposed to be an Americanism, and we have seen many a smile when a Transatlantic visitor announced his intention of going "to skeet." Yet he was right, if the word be the English equivalent of the Dutch "scheet"; but however that may be, Evelyn wrote in his Diary upwards of two hundred years ago of the performances of sliders with "scheets" in St. James's Park, and Samuel Pepys, too, records how he "did see people sliding with their skeates, which is a very pretty art."

"On the stump," and stump-orator, stump speech, and so on, are now common enough expressions which we are supposed to have imported from America. But it is not difficult to see the root connection with "stir your stumps"; and "stumps" as a word for legs was used in English literature quite three hundred years ago. Old Halliwell gives "stump and rump"—viz., leg and thigh—as the equivalent of completely. We take it that a "stump-orator," in American phraseology, was not one who used the stump of a tree for a platform—as some people have laboriously explained—but one who was constantly on the move from place to place working up a cause, "stirring his stumps," as it were, for political or other purposes.

"Heap," as connoting a large quantity, is an awkward enough expression, as in "a heap of people," "a heap of time," "I like him a heap," and so on. But it is not of American origin, and was used in provincial England before ever it was heard across the seas. Indeed, "a heap of thoughts" occurs in Surrey's poems.

"Gent," as a familiar and vulgarised term for gentleman, may have come to us from America, but Mr. Eggleston has recently pointed out that it was used as long ago as 1754, by no less a representative of culture than the President of Princeton College, not as a slang word, but in respectful description of a famous divine. Yet to-day the Slang Dictionary defines gent as "a contraction of gentleman in more senses than one; a dressy, showy, foppish man, with a little mind, who vulgarises the prevailing fashion."

"I guess" is often spoken of as a purely Yankee—i.e., New England—expression, but it was used in the Southern States as well, without any obvious derivation from the North. Now "guess," in the sense of the American use of the word, is used by Chaucer and Shakespeare and many other old English writers. It has more the meaning of suppose or think than of conjecture, but an educated American will use the word "judge" more frequently than "guess." That "guess" was used in the Colonial days of America is known, but when "calculate" or "calc'late" first came to be used as a synonym is not very clear. Mr. Eggleston says that "calc'late" is exclusively Yankee, and is limited to the substratum of folk-speech. So, on the Ohio River, 'guess' is genteel enough for colloquial use, but 'low' is lower class. . . 'I allow,' or rather 'I 'low,' in its commonest sense, is equivalent to 'I guess,' 'I calculate,' 'I reckon,' and the Englishman's 'I fancy.'

"Reckon," however, is more distinctively Southern than "guess." Indeed, Mark Twain says: "The Northern word 'guess'—imported from England where it used to be common, and now regarded by satirical Englishmen as a Yankee original—is but little used among Southerners. They say 'reckon.' They haven't any 'doesn't' in their language; they say 'don't' instead. The unpolished often use 'went' for 'gone.' It is nearly as bad as the Northern 'hadn't ought.'"

But do we not find the same expressions here? Listen to the conversation in a third class railway carriage, or on the deck of a holiday steamer, and you will hear as many "wents" and "hadn't oughts" and "didn't oughts" as in America. Nay, you may hear in England or Scotland the very triumph of Yankee word twisting, as Mark Twain thought—"hadn't ought to have went."

Mark Twain also refers to what he calls certain infelicities in style as examples of Southern Americanisms, such as the dropping of the "r" sound in war, honour, dinner, and so forth, and the use of the word "like" for "as" ("like So-and-So did"). But does the average Cockney ever sound his "r"? And even in books written by reputedly educated English people, do we not frequently find the vulgar misuse of the word "like"?

Certain peculiarities of spelling, however, are essentially American—such as traveler for traveller; theater and center for theatre

and centre; honor and labor for honour and labour; program for programme; catalogue for catalogue; and so on. These are distinct Americanisms, which are defended by American philologists as not oddities but proprieties.

"The fall," for the autumn, is an expression which has extended from New England all through America. It is now in common use there, but it is not a native Americanism. It was, indeed, employed by Dryden, and has obvious and not unpoetical association with the fall of the leaf.

"Tetchy" for touchy or irritable has been spoken of as an Americanism, but it may be found in Shakespeare, and can be heard yet in daily use in the West of England.

In some glossaries "pie" is given as an Americanism for "tart," but it is not so. No doubt "pie" is more universally used—and perhaps more universally consumed—in the United States than in Great Britain, but in the North of England, and probably in many other parts, "pie" is as often made with fruit as with meat. Indeed, we should be disposed to call "fruit-tart" quite a modern Anglicanism, for who does not know the time-worn story of "Apple pie"?

"Absquatulate" is given in Bartlett's Dictionary of Americanisms as a facetious vulgarism, but it seems to have originated with the "coloured gentleman" of the South, and to have come into use in the same kind of playful way as some of us might use "no forrarder." The disposition of the American negro to multiplication and confusion of syllables is well known.

"I do admire at," in the sense of "I wonder," is an American expression; but it has authority in Milton. "I should admire to do so," in the sense of "I should like to," is regarded as an American vulgarism; but one may hear the expression in eastern England, to which it was certainly not brought from America.

"Around," in the sense of being near or on the spot, strikes one, no doubt, as peculiar. "I'll be around on time," "He was standing around," etc., have certainly a distinct Transatlantic flavour. But when Richard A. Proctor tell us he once heard an American preacher speaking of Mary as "standing around the Cross," he recalls memories of the Irishman who "surrounded" his cottage. Again, "all there," or "all there when the bell rings," are expressions too suggestive of an English race-course to have been wholly American-born expressions. And again, "to talk back," given in some

glossaries as an American equivalent for "to answer impudently," is a fault which many a British housewife has frequently to lament in her maid-servants—certainly with no more idea of using Americanese than of speaking Chinese.

"Awful" means ugly in New England, and excessive in the West, according to Bartlett. In the Eastern and Middle States, says Proctor, one often hears "awful handsome," "awful hungry," and so on. Quite so; but may one not hear the same expressions just as often in England? And what about the "awfully jolly," "awfully pretty," "thanks awfully," etc., of young England?

To "belittle" (to depreciate) is called an Americanism because Webster says that it is "not used in England," a remark which shows that Webster cannot be accepted as an authority on English phraseology. The word is, if not very common, at all events very familiar here.

"You bet" is more a Western than a Yankee expression, and has emanated naturally enough from a community where gambling was prevalent. But it has so rapidly commended itself to all speakers of the English language in search of some pithy way of emphasizing confidence in a fact or statement, that it can now hardly be regarded as an Americanism. And as an intensative it has a good deal more to be said for it than the curious intonation of the words "A' think," with which a South Yorkshireman will clinch an assertion, by which he conveys absolute certainty, while seeming to suggest doubt.

America, one constantly hears, is the land of liquors, and "big things," "big whisky," etc., are cited as Americanisms. But to "look big" and to "talk big" are very old English slang expressions; we have had "big-wigs" for generations, and "big with fate" for centuries. And has the gentleman who thought it odd to hear of "big whisky" in the United States never heard a connoisseur at home comment on a "big wine"? Why, our cellars have been filled with "big" clarets and ports long before the American spirit was distilled.

Is "bilin'," as in "the whole bilin'" or "the hull bilin'"—a Yankeeism? It is to be found as much in use in eastern England as in eastern America. Then, while to "blow" in America means to brag, and here it means more usually to blab, yet is the American "blower" not own brother to the Englishman who blows his own trumpet? From "to blow" naturally comes "to bluff."

Bobbery (row), given in some glossaries of Americanisms, is elsewhere put down as an Anglo-Indianism. Somebody has tried to trace its origin to the Hindu "harbari," but as a matter of fact it is a common word over the greater part of England. We have heard it sometimes altered to "Bob's-a-dyin'," and "Bob's-delight." Perhaps it may have something to do with the slang name of the suppressor of rows, and "Bobby" for peace-officer is certainly much older than Sir Robert Peel's "Peeler" or policeman.

"Bogus" appears in the Slang Dictionary as "an American term for anything pretending to be that which it is not, such as bogus degrees, bogus titles, etc." And Webster gives it two meanings—first as an adjective, signifying spurious, "a cant term originally applying to counterfeit coin, and hence denoting anything counterfeit;" and second as a noun, "a liquor made of rum and molasses." Bartlett attributes the origin to a foreigner called Borghese, who gained some notoriety in America by passing counterfeit notes, but Lowell thought the word was French, and came from Louisiana, where the useless refuse of the sugar-cane is called "bagasse." The one theory is as likely or as unlikely as the other, but whatever its origin, "bogus" is now quite as much English as American.

Bully for excellent—"bully for you"—is not of American origin, though a word frequently in American mouths, especially in stories. Now, bully has with us usually a disagreeable meaning, but Shakespeare uses it once or twice as a term of endearment, and it is probably the same word as the old Scotch "billie," or "billy," a term, as Jamieson says, expressive of affection and familiarity.

In one glossary of Americanisms we have seen, "Call, an invitation to a church minister to occupy the pulpit of a given place of worship as its regular pastor." Needless to tell Scotch readers that the term in this connection has been common property in Scotland from time immemorial.

Chaw, as in the well-known verses, "The way that critter chawed up rats was gorging for to see," is really good old English. Johnson has it, and both Spenser and Dryden use it.

"The clean thing" for a right proceeding may or may not be an Americanism, but it is certainly suggestive of the "clean potatoes" of English slang.

Elegant is by Americans used with regard to scenery and food, as well as applied to

attire or to manners. But then have we not also "elegant extracts"?

Galluses, for braces—otherwise called suspenders—is supposed to be an Americanism. We remember the word forty years ago in the North of England, where it was regarded as a local vulgarism. Yet in a Dictionary of Americanisms we have seen it described, "an elegant figure of speech peculiar to the South and West of America."

To "go for" something or somebody is merely an American form of the University man's "go in for honours." We have here "little goes," and "great goes," and "rum goes," and "pretty goes," and "no goes," if the Americans can "go one better," or "go it blind," or "go Democrat," or "go the whole hog." Not much choice in the way of elegance, it must be confessed.

Gotten, as the participle of the verb to get, is common enough in the States, but it is a strictly correct old English form.

One commentator, we notice, gives "hypothecate" as an Americanism derived from the German as an equivalent for pledge or mortgage. Evidently he had never heard of the Scotch law of hypothec.

"Let be" is not an Americanism, though more used in America than here. It is good old English, and occurs in the Bible. Similarly, when an American gets "licked" he owes his description to old Tudor English, familiar to every English schoolboy to-day. Even "big licks" are not an American invention. "Mad" for angry is called an American vulgarism. It was not so regarded in the days of good Queen Bess, and one may even find the same use of the word in the refined pages of Miss Edgeworth.

An American, when he receives his letters by post, gets his "mail," but so also does an Anglo-Indian.

A New Englander who sulks is said to "meech," and a Somersetshire man would have no difficulty in knowing what was meant. Shakespeare knew the word, and so did Beaumont and Fletcher, and other old writers. From it doubtless comes the word "smouch," to steal.

"Mugwump" is not a pretty word, and it is essentially American as applied to a politician who separates from his party and sets up an independent faction. Yet, curiously enough, it is taken from the Bible, for in the Indian translation it was the word ("Mukquomp") used for the Dukes of Edom.

"Peart" in America means lively, not pert or "cheeky." But it was used by old English writers in the same sense, and is still so current in many parts of rural England.

"Real estate," meaning land and house property, is the American application of good legal English in a comprehensive manner.

An American who speaks of "sagging markets" is derided, yet the expression is quite English and legitimate. To sag means to warp or to sink, and any English or Scotch joiner will tell you what a "sagging" door or ceiling means. A market which is drooping is certainly "sagging." Macbeth knew what it was to "sag with doubt."

"Shebang" is a word that has puzzled many American commentators, yet any constable in Scotland or in Ireland would have no difficulty in describing a shebeen.

"To shin" is given as an Americanism for to climb, but what Scotch boy does not know how to "shin a tree"?

"Shyster" in America is a blackguard lawyer, and in Australia means a worthless digging. The word is only a variant of the English slang or cant word "Shicer," which means a mean, worthless individual, who will not work, but who to beg is not ashamed.

"Skedaddle," adopted into the American language after the Battle of Bull Run, is a Lowland-Scotch word for spill, which seems to have come from the Anglo-Saxon "Sceadan," to separate. An American who is scared is either "skert" or "scart," but ask a Scotch boy what it is to "scart his buttons."

In a little book about "Current Americanisms," by Mr. T. B. Russell (from which we have taken some of the above examples), we read: "The Dutchman who was the first-comer in what is now the State of New York, has still his history writ large in the land over which he cast out his generously proportioned shoe. 'Stoop' for the porch of a house is readily recognisable as Dutch; 'Cookies' are small cakes, Dutch both in name and in origin. The now universal 'Boss' for a person in authority (there are no masters in America), or, in general terms, a superior individual, was and is 'Baas' in Holland. It has grown apace in its new home, and has taken on adjectival functions: 'Yes, sir! I've been all round Yurrupe, seeing the elephants, and I've had a boss time of it.' It is also a verb—'to boss the show.'"

This may be, and certainly "stoop" is suggestive of the Afrikaner's "stoep." Nevertheless, in Scotland we have "stoop," or "stoup," for a prop or support, and the porch of a house is something propped against it. The "stoup of the kirk" has a somewhat different meaning, but it is the

same word. And then as to "cookie," why, to this day it is the name of a small sweet bun well-known in Scotland.

No doubt the American language has derived much from both Dutch and Spanish, and French and Indian, but it is only a branch of the English language after all, and, as we have shown, many of its apparent novelties are really of English or Scotch origin. Even the peculiar drawl of the Yankee was taken over in the "Mayflower" by the pilgrims from the English northern counties, where something very like it may be heard even unto this day.

THE SIGN OF CONTEMPT.

THE smaller puzzles of life are often quite as tantalising as the larger and more solemn mysteries. There are mysterious points to be seen and noted every day in matters of costume, habit, and manners. Even the manners of the street—or the absence thereof—present interesting problems. What, for instance, is the origin, the meaning, the true inwardness of that sign of contempt, so dear to the London "gamin," which consists of a "nose-adapted thumb" and outspread fingers? That its purpose is insulting is obvious enough, but why? The insult is deepened, and the contempt still more bitterly expressed, it is said, if the outstretched fingers be gently wagged to and fro. This is what the vulgar call "taking a sight." The bard of the "Ingoldsby Legends" has described it in immortal verse:

The sacristan, he says no word that indicates a doubt,
But he puts his thumb unto his nose, and spreads
his fingers out!

A refinement on this performance—if such an idea be conceivable—used to be in favour with boys under the name of "coffee-milling." This has been described by an expert as making the closed right hand revolve round the little finger of the left. An allusion to this graceful action may be found in the Bon Gaultier ballad which parodies "Locksley Hall":

Coffee-milling care and sorrow, with a nose-adapted thumb.

There are other names given to this undignified gesture besides "taking a sight," although none of them takes us any farther into the heart of the mystery. Schoolboys and schoolgirls—"proh pudor!"—have been heard to speak of it as "making a snook," or, more elegantly, as "making Queen Anne's Fan." The latter phrase introduces a subsidiary mystery into

the discussion, for what the poor Queen, whose death is always being announced as beyond dispute, has to do in this galley it would take a very wise man indeed to explain. In the North of England they use a still more enigmatical phrase, and the metropolitan "taking a sight" becomes "pulling bacon." A year or two ago the papers reported a case at Leeds in which a coachman was summoned for having driven on the wrong side of the road; and two constables solemnly gave evidence to the effect that seeing this Jehu on the wrong side, they spoke to him, when "he put his fingers to his nose and 'pulled bacon' at them." It is consolatory to know that this very rude driver was promptly fined twenty shillings; but the why and the wherefore of the phrase "pulling bacon" still remain a mystery.

None of these names throws any light upon the origin of this sign of contempt. They all have a very modern sound, while the action itself, strange to say, is by no means a thing of yesterday. There is a curious passage in Rabelais which shows that that past master in vulgarisms, ancient and modern, quite understood how to take a sight. When Panurge meets the Englishman, we are told that he, Panurge—perhaps out of delicate compliment to our insular manners and customs—"suddenly lifted up in the air his right hand and put the thumb thereof into the nostril of the same side, holding his four fingers straight out, and closed orderly in a parallel line to the point of his nose, shutting the left eye wholly, and making the other wink with profound depression of the eyebrows and eyelids." The left hand is then brought into line much as in the more modern process. The performance thus described by Rabelais is somewhat more elaborate than that in favour with the London street urchin of to-day, but was probably effective enough.

Of old, the middle finger—*famosus*—was the finger of scorn or contempt. There are allusions to this in various classical writers. "Longman" is the old English name for the same digit, and his equivocal reputation seems to have survived from Roman times. Minshew, in his "Polyglot Dictionary" of 1625, informs the world that a soldier or a doctor should wear his ring upon the thumb, a sailor on the forefinger, "a fool on the middle," a married or a diligent person on the fourth, and a lover on the fifth. But the solution of the "sight-taking" mystery is hardly to be

found in this direction, for the middle finger plays no special or leading part in the courtesies of the street. The essence of the insult seems to lie in the thumb, and it is probably in connection with the thumb that some side-light may be thrown on the performance whose mystery is practically insoluble. The extension of the fingers and the contemptuous wagging thereof, are the ornamental parts of the gesture; the root of the matter lies in the thumb.

It is hardly necessary to enlarge upon the important part played by that useful member throughout the ages, from the days when the droop of a myriad thumbs meant life to the beatengladiator, or the upturning of the same, accompanied by the cruel "Habet!" that rang from the crowded benches, sealed the death warrant of the victim of the public lust for blood—from these remoter days through feudal times when the tenant knelt and licked his superior's thumb, to the "biting of thumbs to beget quarrels," which was so commonly practised in Elizabethan times. It is in this contemptuous use of the thumb that we may find, if not an origin, at least a parallel to the form of insult or token of contempt known as "taking a sight." "I will bite my thumb at them, which is a disgrace to them if they bear it," says Sampson in "Romeo and Juliet," at the approach of the retainers of the hated house of Montague; and there is plenty of evidence to show that this biting of the thumb was a very common form of insult in Elizabethan and earlier times, both in this country and on the Continent. The gesture is still used by the vulgar in France, where the "*modus operandi*" is probably the same as that employed by the truculent Sampson. It consists in placing the nail of the thumb under the front teeth of the upper jaw, and then jerking the thumb forward, using at the same time some expression of contempt.

Another form of insult in which the thumb played a leading part was the making of a "*fico*," or fig, which reached us from the South of Europe, where it is still practised. A "fig" is made by interlocking the thumb between the first and second fingers of the closed fist. This is also still practised in Spain and Italy as a charm against the dreaded "*jettatura*," or evil eye. It is said that whenever Ferdinand the First of Naples appeared in public, he was accustomed to put his hand in his pocket, and with thumb and fingers make the "fig," which he believed would protect him from the influence of the evil

eye. The thumb has been used in several other ways for the averting of spiritual ill or hurt. There is no evidence whereby we can trace any direct connection between either the "ficio" of contemptuous intent, or the biting of thumbs, with the action of the sacristan in the Ingoldsby legend; but it is at least highly probable that all three highly reprehensible gestures have a similar origin—in the significance of the thumb. Yet who can tell? After all, it may be with "taking a sight" as with the needy knife-grinder—"Story? God bless you, I have none to tell, sir!"—and origin or ancestry it may have none.

RICHENDA.

By MARGARET MOULE.

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CHAPTER III.

"COME a little faster, Brian darling, I think it is going to rain."

"Brian darling" was a boy of about four years old, whose pretty white sailor suit looked cool in the copper-coloured glare made by thundery clouds near the sun; and the child's fresh little face, with round enquiring eyes, looked cool also. It was turned up to Richenda with a confiding smile by way of answer.

"I like you," said the small boy in a low, meditative voice. "You are so jolly." "You're much nicer than nurse was!"

The little speech came in a high, clear little voice from a second child, on the other side of Richenda; a child of rather striking physique and feature; a little dark-eyed, dark-skinned slip of a thing; small even for her five years.

"Isn't she nicer, Dolly?" pulling at the sleeve of the small girl in a little green smock who was seated in solemn and rather stolid state in a mail-cart which Richenda was pushing. Her round face was fixed intently on the darkening sky before her, and she only nodded in answer to her sister's words.

The curious hush that precedes a thunder storm had suddenly dropped, as it were, upon the air; and all the sounds in the Park, at least in that part of it where Richenda and the children were walking, were deadened by it. It was growing very dark under the trees, and looked darker yet by contrast with the lurid glare that was rapidly blotting all the blue out of the summer sky.

Richenda looked down and smiled at the two upturned faces.

"I am so glad you like me," she said. "We'll have some nice times together, won't we?"

Richenda was looking very pretty. Her plainly made white cotton dress set off her pretty figure almost as well as the tiny, close black bonnet that was put on with such perfect neatness, accentuated the lovely colour of her hair. Her eyes were very soft and bright, and her face looked happy instead of anxious as she looked down at the childish faces. The four were some minutes' walk from Bryanston Street. It was the first walk which Richenda had taken with the children, for it was the afternoon of the twentieth, and she had only entered upon her new work five hours before.

"We must be very quick," she added, as a low growl of thunder was heard. At the sound of the thunder Veronica, the little dark-eyed girl, slipped her tiny hand under Richenda's on the mail-cart handle for protection. The sturdier Brian looked as if he would like to do the same, but thought it beneath the dignity of his manhood.

"Veronica's frightened," he remarked protectingly to Richenda.

Three or four heavy drops splashed down upon the hot pavement as they came out of the Park; and by the time they reached the end of Bryanston Street they were coming thick and fast. Richenda had hurried so much that a bright flush was in her cheeks when the little party stopped at length in front of the door of number twelve. She had unfastened the strap which held Dolly into the mail-cart and set her down, and she was struggling to lift the mail-cart—it was rather a heavy one—up the two steps into the portico, when a strange voice made her start.

"How do, Veronica? How do, Brian?" were the words she heard spoken in a languid but high-pitched drawl.

Richenda looked up and saw on the doorstep above her a young man. His age might have been, to judge from his voice, five or six and twenty; to judge from his much lined, blasé face, it might have been five or six and thirty. He was faultlessly dressed in a light grey suit, with a frock-coat of irreproachable cut. Indeed, every detail about him, from his carefully waxed moustache to the tips of his brilliant patent leather boots, was irreproachable also. He would have been handsome in a dark, strongly marked style,

if it had not been that the regular features all lent themselves to the jaded air of inexpressible boredom which was his leading expression. He was in the act of holding Veronica's little hand up in the air in an affected shake at the moment when Richenda looked up. He let it drop with a suddenness that startled the child, and fixed a pair of singularly unpleasant dark eyes full on Richenda's face.

"Great Scott!" he muttered under his breath.

Richenda flushed a deeper crimson still, and Veronica struck in in a clear little voice. Brian had fallen back in a corner, far too shy to speak.

"Was you coming to call, Mr. Kennaway?"

He did not answer.

"Shall I ring the bell for you?" practical Veronica went on. "We was going to ring it for ourselves."

"Who is 'we'?" he demanded abruptly, at the same time extending his right hand and ringing the bell for himself.

Richenda had lifted the mail-cart on to the top step, and was now standing with Brian in her hand opposite Mr. Kennaway, under the portico. The rain was pouring in torrents now, so she could not take shelter outside from his insolent stare.

"Who is we?" he repeated, without moving his eyes from her face.

"Us and nurse."

"Oh, us and nurse," he repeated, with an accent on the last word which conveyed to Richenda's indignant ears—as it was meant to do—the surprise that her appearance and her position had caused him. At that moment, to her unspeakable thankfulness, the front door was opened, and Mr. Kennaway, after much unnecessary delay in putting down his stick, followed the smart parlourmaid upstairs to the drawing-room.

"Nurse, your cheeks is burning, and your eyes is shining," said Veronica half an hour later, as they all sat in the nursery window together. Brian was on Richenda's lap, and the two little girls were on the floor at her feet. She was telling them the story of the White Cat, while the nurse-maid got tea ready.

"It must have been the thunder, I think," continued the child, "what made you so hot? I'm glad it's over, aren't you?" she said, with a glance at the sky, now beginning to grow blue and serene again.

Whatever Richenda might have said was prevented by the entrance of the smart parlourmaid.

"Miss Veronica is wanted in the drawing-room," she said abruptly. "Sir Roderick Graeme is here!"

"Oh!" and Veronica was up on her little legs in a moment. "He is my godfather, and he is such a nice godfather! He nearly always brings chocolate, and sometimes he comes to tea—up here, I mean. I shall bring him up to-night. Brush my hair quick, please, dear nurse! Amelia needn't wait for me. I shall come down in a minute."

But Amelia chose to wait, and scrutinised all Richenda's proceedings until the child was ready to dance out of the room by her side.

Scarcely five minutes had elapsed, and Richenda was just making the nursery tea with Dolly clinging to her skirt, when the door burst open and Veronica ran joyfully in.

"Mother's out!" she cried. "Gone out with Mr. Kennaway, and I've brought up Sir Roderick to have some tea with us. I said I should bring him up, and I told him I wanted him to see you, nurse. Come in, godfather dear!"

And with the funniest little nod of her small head by way of emphasis Veronica moved out of the doorway and left room for a tall young man, who had followed her, to come in. He stood in the doorway for an instant.

"This is nurse, godfather!" Veronica slipped her little hand into Richenda's.

The young man coloured suddenly, and hesitated. Then he bowed gravely. Richenda inclined her pretty head quite as gravely, and, apparently encouraged, he came in. He was a very tall young man—he could not have been far short of six feet high. He was broad-shouldered and strong-looking, and somehow his well-cut clothes, that were quite as irreproachable as Mr. Kennaway's, seemed to sit a trifle incongruously upon his athletic-looking figure. He had a pleasant face, not by any means handsome, but yet with something attractive about it; honest looking eyes; curly brown hair, from which even its fashionable shortness could not take all the curl; and a slight fair moustache.

"Don't you think she's a nice nurse?" Veronica added. And the other two, accustomed to look to Veronica for a lead in everything, echoed her words.

The young man crimsoned again.

"Yes," he said. Then he strode across the room to the window without so much as a glance in Richenda's direction.

"Brian, my boy," he said, sitting down. "Come here and tell me how that engine of yours gets on—that engine you were making out of the biscuit tin."

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. FITZGERALD'S drawing-room was a room curiously characteristic both of its owner and of its owner's position in life. It was the ordinary London drawing-room; a room on the first floor with two long windows looking into the street. The heavy window frames that corresponded with the period of the house had been taken away, and light, long plate-glass windows put in their place. The folding doors, too, between the back and front drawing-rooms had been removed; and from the heavy, handsome bit of cornice that had finished them at the top, when they and the room had been built, depended sweeping silk brocade curtains of a Louis Quinze design. The same incongruity was visible throughout. In the darkest corners of the solid old room, corners that ought to have been filled with comfortable chintz-covered chairs and sofas of some old English make, were uncomfortable, glaringly smart little groups of white and gold chairs, screens, and tiny tables. The walls were panelled with brocade in pink and gold; and some cabinets that pretended to be good, and were not, and one beautiful table of Venetian mosaic completed the incongruous plenishing. Mrs. Fitzgerald's room was a mixture of whatever took her fancy as "the newest thing" grafted on to a good solid background, just as she, the very rich daughter of a Leeds manufacturer, had been grafted on to the poor but old Irish family whose name she bore.

Colonel Fitzgerald had been dead about three years, killed suddenly on parade by some mischance with a battery. He had been a good-natured but clear-headed and strong-minded man, and during his lifetime had been master both of his house and of his wealthy, self-willed wife. Mrs. Fitzgerald had been much quieter before what she occasionally referred to as her "awful affliction"; but since her husband's strong hand had been removed she had gone her own way with an energy and an expenditure which had resulted in winning for her the reputation of being one of the smartest and richest women in London.

One of the items of this expenditure, one of the most successful, perhaps, was the salary she paid to the very best cook, short

of a French one, that money could procure; and her favourite form of entertainment was dinner-parties. Those she most prided herself upon she called succinctly her "Wednesdays." They consisted entirely of men, with the exception of one woman, a Mrs. Milton; who, as she used laughingly to explain to all new-comers, was "kind enough to come and make things pleasant."

One of these "Wednesdays" took place on the day after Richenda Leicester's arrival at Bryanston Street. Among the four guests—four was always Mrs. Fitzgerald's number, exclusive of herself and Mrs. Milton—were Sir Roderick Graeme and the dark young man who had met the children on the doorstep: Mr. Fergus Kennaway, to give him his proper name.

Dinner was over and the men had just come into the drawing room. Mrs. Fitzgerald was sitting in a low chair under a tall lamp, and close to her, standing practically one on each side of her, were Sir Roderick Graeme and Fergus Kennaway.

Mrs. Fitzgerald was looking very handsome. The soft light that escaped from the lamp-shade made the most of her good points, and in the evening the artificialities of her face were scarcely visible. She was very becomingly dressed in a purple gown, with a good deal of old lace and some diamonds about her. Fergus Kennaway seemed to admire the effect her toilet had produced. His black eyes scanned and appraised slowly and critically. Sir Roderick Graeme was looking down at her, too; but it was evident that he was much more intent upon what he was saying than upon any detail about the woman to whom he said it.

"Then you will come with me to the Academy to-morrow, Mrs. Fitzgerald?" he said.

Mrs. Fitzgerald looked up with a smile—a smile that was evidently meant to include both men—and her eyes rested, not on the man she spoke to, but on Fergus Kennaway. He was standing close to the pedestal of the lamp, tapping the ground with the point of his shoe in an impatient manner.

"To-morrow?" he broke in eagerly. "Why, to-morrow——"

But Mrs. Fitzgerald silenced him with a little movement of her hand.

"To-morrow I'm almost afraid I can't, Sir Roderick, after all," she said. "It really is so awfully full, I don't seem to have the least little bit of time."

Sir Roderick laid his hand eagerly on Mrs. Fitzgerald's chair.

"Time!" he said. "Oh, it doesn't want any time—at least, none to speak of. I know a fellow who'll tell me what pictures we ought to see, and we needn't bother to see anything else. We can just slip out and have some tea somewhere. I'll bring my new hansom for you—it's an awfully nice turn-out—it really is!"

Mrs. Fitzgerald's eyes had wandered, inadvertently as it seemed, to Fergus Kennaway's face, and she was covertly scanning its expression as she began to speak.

"Thanks awfully," she said. "It's really very good of you. I should be delighted if——"

But her words were broken off suddenly.

The white and gold door of the drawing-room was opened, opened by a little uncertain touch, and into the room, barefooted, dressed only in her little frilled white nightgown, with all her short dark hair lying loose on her childish shoulders, came Veronica. The wide open eyes saw nothing and looked for nothing; the childish tread came steadily along the soft carpet.

"Veronica!" almost screamed Mrs. Fitzgerald; but Sir Roderick laid his hand hastily on her arm.

"Don't!" he said. "Don't! Be quiet or she'll be frightened. She's walking in her sleep, isn't she?"

His question was echoed by the other three who had come up to the group under the lamp at the sound of Mrs. Fitzgerald's voice.

"Walking in her sleep, yes!" was the angry answer. "What can that fool of a woman be about? I'm sure she might have known she did it, if she is strange to the place."

"Don't see how if you never told her," muttered Fergus Kennaway.

But Mrs. Fitzgerald did not hear him. She had risen and was walking towards the small white figure which was the odd little cynosure of six pairs of eyes. She took the child up in her arms, with a tenderness that was really womanly and sat strangely upon her; she tucked the child in her white frills carefully in her arms; and then, refusing all Sir Roderick's offers to carry his godchild, she swept out of the room with the little sleeping form nestled against her lace and diamonds.

For a moment or two no one spoke. Then Mrs. Milton laughed. She was a pretty, fairylike little woman in a gauzy dress of startling pink and green, and

her laugh had a little tinkling sound about it.

"I'm sorry for that nurse!" she said. "However, she is new, so perhaps she won't catch it quite so severely as she might have done. She must be rather a fool, though!"

"I don't see why," said Sir Roderick hotly. "One isn't supposed to hold a child's hand all night, is one?"

Fergus Kennaway cast one of his peculiarly unpleasant glances at him.

"Hard on the nurse," he drawled, "if one were!"

"What an awfully pretty little beggar it is," said one of the other guests—a Mr. Powell, who somewhere in an infinitesimal corner of his conventional heart kept a remembrance of certain little sisters of his own. "I didn't know Mrs. Fitzgerald's children were so pretty."

"Oh, yes!" said Mrs. Milton, with another little tinkling laugh; "they are. They're all like their father, I believe. He was good-looking."

This was said with the covered sarcasm in which the sort of friendship that united Mrs. Fitzgerald and Mrs. Milton delights. Mrs. Milton was heartily jealous of Mrs. Fitzgerald's money, and of her face; and though she came willingly enough to the house whenever she could, she never lost any opportunity of flinging a dart at her friend.

"The children aren't half so pretty as their nurse, though," said Fergus Kennaway languidly.

"The nurse!" laughed Mrs. Milton questioningly.

"The nurse!" echoed Sir Roderick.

"What do you know about her?"

"Saw her on the doorstep yesterday," said Fergus Kennaway. "I was waiting to be let in—so was she. And I had a good look at her. She's an awfully pretty woman, and no mistake about it!"

An odd little flush came over Sir Roderick's forehead, and he looked as if he were going to speak. But if it were so the words remained unuttered, for the door opened and Mrs. Fitzgerald re-entered.

"Well, Constance, and have you blown that poor woman up much?"

Mrs. Fitzgerald was looking considerably annoyed; two angry dashes of colour on her cheeks made themselves visible through her carefully prepared colouring.

"Blown her up? Yes, of course I have!" she said angrily in answer to Mrs. Milton. "Servants are born to be idiots, I think!"

"You'd better not be too hard on this one," laughed Mrs. Milton; "Mr. Kennaway has just been telling us that she is very pretty. He admires her excessively."

"Pretty? That she certainly is not!" The words almost burst from Mrs. Fitzgerald. The whole group was standing, and Mrs. Fitzgerald turned round to Fergus Kennaway with a quick gesture that sent the train of her purple gown "flopping," as he afterwards expressed it, against Mr. Powell. "Where in the world did you see her, and what do you know about her?" she demanded. Her eyes were shining, and the dashes of colour had spread until her carefully arranged face looked almost florid. They were the same words that Roderick Graeme had used not three minutes before to the same man, and they were spoken in much the same tone.

"I saw her yesterday," Fergus Kennaway replied. "Saw her on your own doorstep. And she's really uncommonly pretty—for a servant!"

"She doesn't look a bit like a servant!"

The words came from Sir Roderick Graeme abruptly.

"Were you on the doorstep too, then?" enquired Mrs. Fitzgerald sardonically.

The rest of the men and Mrs. Milton laughed. The flush had deepened on Sir Roderick's brow, and his statement had evidently escaped from him impulsively. But he stuck to it manfully.

"No," he said simply. "I asked to see

Veronica when I came yesterday, because I had some chocolate for her. She took me up into the nursery."

"Oh, you've had altogether superior opportunities, then, Graeme! Kennaway and his doorstep are quite out of it. And what did you think of this nurse when you had got your chance?"

The speaker was Mr. Powell. Every one laughed except Mrs. Fitzgerald. Her eyes were plainly asking the same question as that which he had put into words.

"Come, now," said another man who considered himself rather a wit; "you won't make us believe that you went up in the nursery to see those children. Don't you think it!"

"He never gave the children a thought," said Mrs. Milton mockingly. "But he might have the grace to contribute his opinion to this controversy!"

Sir Roderick had stood silent during this fire of wit.

"I never saw the girl," he said hurriedly. "I mean I never looked at her. Servants are not in my line, though they seem to be in Kennaway's!"

Mrs. Fitzgerald's eyes were questioning no more, but there was considerable anger in them.

"I think we are all wasting our time on very uninteresting subjects!" she said witheringly. "Servants are not in my line either—as subjects for conversation! Can't we have a game of poker or something lively?"

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By MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

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"Cross Currents," etc., etc.*

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A LITTLE later North Branston had left the house, and was walking swiftly along the street towards his rooms. It was a lovely night. The air was soft but not oppressive, and from a cloudless sky the full moon shed a radiance beneath which streets and houses, without a beauty of their own, lay transfigured. North Branston's face was very still; his eyes were deep and glowing, and the light within touched his every feature into a peace such as had never rested on them before. He walked straight on, glancing neither to the right nor to the left, taking the right road mechanically and by instinct. The touch of Eve Karslake's hand was still upon him; her kiss still lingered on his lips; and in the realisation and satisfaction which that kiss had brought him, all his other senses—all cynicism, all bitterness, all weariness—were, for the moment, lulled to rest.

He reached the house in which he lived, and let himself in with his latch-key. As he went upstairs he noticed with a vague surprise that the door of his room was half open, and that there was a bright light within. He pushed the door open and went in, glancing about him involuntarily as he did so. And then he stopped suddenly short. Seated by the table, and facing the door, was Mrs. Vallotson.

For the instant, as his eyes rested on her, a flash of astonishment—the simple surprise created by her unexpected presence—touched North Branston's features. It

passed, superseded by a darkening and settling of his whole face; an instinctive blotting out of the unlikely and unlooked for in her appearance, even at such an hour, before that inalienable sense of antagonism and defiance which seemed in this all dominating assertion of itself to assert, also, its existence as the supreme factor in his being.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Adelaide!" he said slowly. "To what do I owe it?"

Mrs. Vallotson was dressed, as she had been when she left Lady Karslake's house an hour before, in a long black velvet mantle. She had no covering on her head, and her face, framed in her grey hair and set off by the sombre black which fell from her throat to her feet, looked almost ashen in its pallor. It was singularly noticeable that her colourlessness in no way tended to the refinement of her face. Still as it was on the surface, there seemed to be some kind of tense emotion stirring underneath, innately coarse in its suggestion. Her eyes glittered slightly with that singular and almost reckless excitement which is sometimes induced by the long-continued defiance and inexorable suppression of acute agony. She followed North with her eyes as he crossed the room, but she made no other movement.

"The wedding is not put off, I suppose?" She spoke with an abrupt assumption of carelessness most uncharacteristic of her, and her voice jarred a little.

"No!" he said grimly. "Why should it be put off?"

There was no reply. Mrs. Vallotson hardly seemed to have heard the question, and her eyes had wandered from North Branston's face and were fixed on the wall behind him. As though affected by the

silence in spite of himself, an added hardness settled about North Branston's mouth.

"I don't imagine that you have come here, at this time of night, to ask me that question, Adelaide," he said harshly. "If you'll tell me what you have come for I shall be glad. I've a good deal to do!"

With a feverish movement Mrs. Vallotson rose from her chair.

"Come for?" she said in an odd, uneven voice. "What should I have come for?"

"That is precisely what I should be glad to know!"

She looked at him for a moment, the excitement beating behind the rigid quiet of her features giving her face an indescribably painful effect. Then she turned violently away.

"For nothing, of course!" she said. "Nothing! To wish you well, I suppose. To—congratulate you."

The words themselves were nothing. But the tone in which they were uttered—high pitched, rasping, ringing, above all with an unconscious and irrepressible sneer—seemed to penetrate North Branston's sensibility instantaneously and to the quick. She had turned towards the door as she finished, with a rough, instinctive movement; but before she had gone two paces North Branston stood in her path, his face set and livid with suppressed passion, his lips white, a supreme intensity of questioning about his whole person.

"Adelaide," he said thickly and rapidly, "explain yourself. You've come here to-night for some purpose. What is it? To-morrow I begin my life again, and leave the past behind me. If there is any explanation of all that has come and gone between us, of which I do not know, tell it me to-night. If there is any reason, so far concealed from me, against my marriage, let me know it now!"

They were close together. The two dark faces were almost on a level. He saw a ghastly spasm or convulsion pass across her features, he saw something rise in her eyes unfathomable and terrible to meet, and then he saw her face set like a marble mask against his own. As though it came from a long way off he heard her voice, thin and distant.

"There is nothing concealed from you! There is nothing to be explained!"

A moment later, without haste and with a rigid self-possession which was full of dignity, she had passed him, as he mechanically made way for her, and reached the door. On the threshold she turned.

"Shall I find a cab?" she asked.

"I will come down with you!" he replied mechanically.

She passed directly out of the room and down the stairs, he following her. He put her into a passing vehicle and saw it lumber away, no other word having been spoken on either side.

When North re-entered his room alone, hardly ten minutes had passed since he entered it for the first time that night. The strange interview which had awaited him then had occupied but a brief space as seconds and minutes go. But in that brief space his mental condition had been totally altered. The calm in which he had been wrapped had been displaced by an intensity of excitement, created he hardly knew how or to what purpose.

He shut the door of his room, and looked about him with a sombre defiance lurking amid the stir of his expression. An indefinable shadow seemed to fill the room for him; something ominous and foreboding seemed to brood upon it. He crossed the room with a quick stride, and, sitting down at his writing-table, addressed himself to the work that was waiting for him. He had a few letters to write; and then he came to the real business before him—the sorting of his papers.

He worked on steadily, endorsing, destroying, putting by; and as the time passed on the concentration which he brought to his task acquired a dogged character. His lips grew compressed; his eyes never stirred beyond his hand.

All that was hardest, least sensitive, and most practical in North Branston was fighting instinctively and deliberately; fighting something within himself which he could hardly have defined, even if he had chosen to do so; fighting that strange excitement that possessed him as with a vague sense of crisis. His blood was tingling in his veins; his nerves, strung by his scene with Lady Karslake into a beatitude such as he had never known; and since so jarred and grated by Mrs. Vallotson's unexpected appearance, were in a state of acute sensibility. And all his instinct was arrayed against that same sensibility; arrayed to clutch at the commonplace and to repudiate the influence that held him.

His work came to an end at last. He rose and began to pace up and down the room as he lighted a cigar. He was intent, as he thought, on the process. He would smoke one cigar only, he told himself,

before he went to bed. And then, un-realised and unrestrained, his thoughts slipped quietly out of his control.

How far they had gone back! He was thinking of his childhood. He was seeing himself again as that little taciturn boy of whom Alnchester had disapproved; but he had no thought of Alnchester in the matter. He was remembering that little child as he had not remembered him for years. He was recalling, with that strange mixture of memory and mature comprehension which makes so vivid a picture, the waking of the childish perceptions to a sense that somehow or other little North Branston was not like other children, that his world was not their world, nor his life as their lives. He was recalling the sense—half-rebellious and half-sullen—of loneliness and injustice which had made the tragedy of his childhood. And he saw himself, through the mist of years, one of two figures only that stood out sharp and distinct in a common isolation against the shadowy phantasmagoria of his memory—a child and a woman.

His cigar went out between his fingers unnoticed, and he paced up and down. The law which connected the disillusionment of his childhood in his mind with that other and deeper disillusionment which had come to him later in life, might be subtle and far to seek. He did not seek it. He only saw himself again as a young man with aspirations, thoughts, affinities running deep and soaring high. He saw himself alone; shut in upon himself, without a friend, without a guide; forced into contact with that which developed all that was worst in him, the evil genius of his life. He saw his faiths wither and shrivel up in his hands; he saw his spiritual perceptions fail and run dry; he saw his scheme of life shrink and grow narrow until it could hold nothing intangible, nothing beyond this world. He saw himself drifting deliberately into pessimism; he saw himself become that bitterest of all cynics—the cynic whose cynicism is an armour against despair.

A long unconscious sigh roused him from his strangely vivid musings. He came back suddenly to the present; the young man and the child receded into the distance, and he of whom they had held the germ, the North Branston of the present day and hour, stood face to face with the future.

He sat down abruptly, propping his chin on his clenched hands, and looking straight before him. The clock on the mantelpiece struck two, but he did not hear it. His heart was beating slowly and heavily; the

sense of crisis no longer resisted was shaking him through and through. The sense of something ominous and foreboding in the very atmosphere of his room, and brought to it by Mrs. Vallotson's presence, seemed to rise suddenly and close round him until it became part of himself.

The future! The future, to-night, meant for him the morrow. Try as he would, beat against the intangible barrier as he might and did, he could get no further. All that mistily shining stretch of years to come which had unrolled itself before him on the night when he first realised that the solitude of his life was to be shared at last, on the night when the impulse towards reconciliation with Mrs. Vallotson had risen in him, was blotted out. The morrow, vague and shadowy, weighted with a strange and utterly inexplicable darkness, loomed up before him, shutting out all that was to lie beyond. And the centre figure of the future—let him repudiate the fact as he would—was the centre figure of the past; the isolation of the past was the isolation of the future. The influence of the woman he loved, the influence which only an hour before had thrilled him through and through, seemed to have been swept back into a region whither he could not follow it, driven forth by an indomitable power. He stood alone, conscious of his loneliness; conscious of his loss; resisting with every fibre, as a man wrestles with overwhelming physical odds. Out of the blackness which he strove to penetrate, strove to deny, one presence only confronted him—the presence of Mrs. Vallotson.

That there are influences about us other and more powerful than the tangible influences which we understand—influences against which, under certain circumstances, strength of nerve and brain is no slightest protection—is a theory which it is at least unwise wholly to deny. The September night wore on, the September dawn—the dawn of that morrow on which his thoughts were fixed—crept slowly into the sky, and still North Branston sat there by his table dominated and possessed by an influence which had no name, which took no tangible form. He had contested the ground inch by inch; he had denied it and defied it. And as the sunshine stole into the room he sat there still, grave and haggard, its helpless prey.

What was it? He had asked himself the question many times during the night. During the morning, as he went about his final preparations with his face set and stern, he asked himself the question again

and again. Was it a dull sense of foreboding? Was it the very acme of intense undefined anticipation? And instead of any answer from his reason, before his mental vision there would come the face of Mrs. Vallotson, dark, set, and antagonistic, as though the answer were to be found there.

The day grew gradually older. With every hour struck out by the clock the extraordinary tension on his nerves seemed to tighten, as every hour seemed to bring nearer that undefined crisis. He received the friend who was to be his best man, and sat down to luncheon with him like a man in a dream. Presently he was aware that they were walking together through the streets. He heard his friend ask him something about a ring. He put his hand into his pocket mechanically, drew out a little gold circlet, and looked at it curiously. It seemed to have nothing to do with him; to be utterly incongruous with the shadow in which he was living and moving. Then they stopped. A heavy door swung back before him, and he passed out of the September sunshine and the noise and bustle of the streets into the silent half light of a London church.

It was a large church belonging to that heavy and depressing school of architecture which obtained some fifty years ago. It was not half full, and the handful of smart people present seemed, in spite of the festivity of the occasion, to be entirely insufficient to dissipate the gloom of the edifice. The usual whispering chatter was going on, but it had a subdued sound. It ceased suddenly as North Branston walked up the aisle; and the dead silence against which his footsteps rang struck him with a chill which seemed at once to meet and focus the deadly sense of cold that was lying at his heart. All his senses were acutely, preternaturally, alive; all his perceptions were concentrated to one end; the discovery of the material position of the presence with which his every thought was weighted. Was Mrs. Vallotson there?

He walked up to the altar steps, and then he turned and deliberately scanned the faces ranged in the pews before him; scanned them regardless of smiles and little nods, even of beckonings, from the front pews; and scanned them in vain. Mrs. Vallotson was not in the church.

A long breath parted his lips; a breath partly of relief, partly of that strained anticipation which comes from the persistent veiling of a sword the existence of which is not to be denied. He stepped

forward in response to a loudly whispered adjuration from Mrs. Slade-Fenton, who occupied a prominent position, and then, becoming aware that an invitation was being tendered to him to go and speak to Archdeacon French in the vestry, he followed his guide in the same automatic fashion. He must have heard Archdeacon French's kindly words, for he heard his own voice responding in what seemed to be suitable fashion. But the first thing of which he was really conscious was the hurried advent of a verger, with the words:

"The lady's coming, sir!"

Without a word, with a leap of the heart before which all the shadows that surrounded him seemed to flee away, North Branston turned and went out into the church to meet his wife. And as he passed out of the vestry door his gaze fell on the face of Mrs. Vallotson as she sat in the front pew.

His best man saw his lips turn white and took him by the arm to turn him to his place before the altar steps. But North shook off his touch. With his whole figure braced, with every line of his face set into the supreme defiance of an iron resolution, he strode to where Archdeacon French was waiting, and stood there, with his back turned to the church, immovable. He heard the soft rustle of women's dresses coming up the aisle behind him; he felt that the woman he loved stood by his side; but he did not look towards her. Even then, at the very altar, at the very crisis of his repudiation and defiance of her presence, he was alone with the woman who had haunted him through the night; who sat behind now with her black eyes glazed and dead, staring straight into space.

"Dearly beloved,"

The congregation rose, and the woman who was sitting next to Mrs. Vallotson, a relation of Lady Karslake, glanced at her neighbour with an involuntary fascination; there was something indescribably strange about the movements with which the tall, solitary woman rose, and stood gripping the front of the pew.

The address rolled through the church. It ended, and the customary pause ensued. A strange sensation of cold crept over the woman whose eyes had been rivetted throughout on Mrs. Vallotson's clenched hands. Those hands seemed to have grown rigid. The figure to which they belonged seemed to have taken on the immobility of a corpse. Was her terrible

neighbour going to faint? she wondered. The pause was over. Archdeacon French turned to the pair before him and, in a low and solemn voice, began that charge than which the liturgy holds nothing more awe-inspiring and imposing.

"I require and charge you both as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgement, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony ye do now confess it. For be ye well assured that so many as are coupled together otherwise than as God's Word doth allow are not joined together by God, neither is their matrimony lawful."

The woman next Mrs. Vallotson felt a stir in the seat beside her, and saw those rigid fingers unlock themselves and spread themselves out wildly. Turning instinctively to catch her if she should fall, she saw what all the congregation saw.

Mrs. Vallotson had left her place. A strange, dead silence filled the church. Lady Karslake was taking off her glove, and the attention of the little bridal party was concentrated on her movements, as Archdeacon French waited for her. The gaze of every other soul there present was fixed in a kind of spellbound fascination on the woman's figure unknown to almost every one there, drawing nearer and nearer, stumbling and swaying blindly, to the unconscious couple before the altar steps. Mrs. Vallotson uttered no sound. She seemed to be unconscious of spectators. Still in the same dreadful silence, she reached the bridal party, and pushed between the two who stood there side by side, thrusting them asunder. She turned her terrible white face to North, and then a hoarse, thick whisper came from her grey lips:

"Stop!" she said. "It—must not—be!"

The voice died away. Something seemed to rattle in her throat, and she fell heavily between them on the ground.

BLIZZARD-BOUND.

A WESTERN SKETCH.

FOR about a week we had all been enjoying that enforced holiday which a "big snow" gives to ranch people in the Far West. Indeed, it might be said it was the only time in the year we got any holiday at all, spring, summer, and the Fall, all being very busy times, what with one thing and the other; so that when the

snow did come, although I am bound to say we grumbled much at it, yet in our hearts we were very thankful for the real rest-time it gave us. And we ought not to have grumbled either, for, owing to the exceedingly small rainfall in some of the Western States, it was the snow we looked to to supply the land with moisture and to fill the creeks, which usually "boomed" from the mountains after a heavy fall. So that last week we had been resting. I had mended up all my own clothes and the boys' also: no inconsiderable task when one remembers the havoc that hard work, combined with barb wire fencing, will make in the stoutest of tweeds. And the boys had done their share by cobbling up the boots of the establishment, very clumsily in my humble opinion, but, as they were intensely proud of their job when they had finished it—and had only broken three of our best knives and utterly ruined the family hammer over the business—I knew my place and held my tongue, although I would fain have congratulated them over the nickel a pair they had undoubtedly saved by the transaction. But certainly the early-shut-in evenings were enjoyable; we had heaps of firing and plenty of books, half a frozen beef, a sack of flour, and potatoes, so we were well calculated to stand a siege. The cold at nights was the worst, and the poor animals as well as ourselves suffered bitterly from it. It was quite common for the boys to find the horses shivering under their rugs when they went to give them their hot mash in the mornings; whilst as for my chickens, they would be quite lame and cramped with cold when the morning came, and although I took them some hot bread and milk as soon as I could, their first instinct was, not to peck at it, but to flutter towards the steaming panful, and to press themselves against its warm sides.

It was on a Friday that week, that as I was busy after dinner washing up—indeed, I had nearly finished, and was promising myself a good read before supper—I heard a train bell on the Denver and Rio Grande ringing, and running out to look at it, for the trains always had a certain fascination for me, I saw, much to my amusement, for the track was perfectly clear, and the sky was cloudless, that it was puffing along with its big snow-plough, looking for all the world as if the engine had on a iron pinnace in front of it. I looked ahead and around; it seemed perfectly ridiculous that the train should

burden itself with the snow plough. The sun was shining fiercely and brightly; it was so warm that my cotton blouse felt quite sultry, and I needed nothing round my neck; the sky was of an intense blue, and the snow-covered earth looked very pretty under it, the only break in the continuity of whiteness being the two long tracks of the D. and R. G. and the Santa Fé, one on each side of the shanty, stretching away into distance like two gleaming black snakes, and nearer home, the paths which the boys had cut out to the corral, and creek, and dug-out. Indeed, so warm and sunshiny was it that, my work inside being done, I took my book, and mounting the wood pile, sat and read there, the only drawback being the heat of the sun upon my back. For the rest it was splendid, and I just read on, enjoying the warmth, till one of the boys came up and went into the dairy to hack off a joint from the frozen beef we had hanging up in there for supper. As he returned and drew up a bucket of water to thaw it out in, I called out that the railway men had evidently gone mad, for a train had just passed with its snow plough on. He turned sharply round at this.

"Mad, no; there is generally method in madness of that kind," he exclaimed, shading his eyes with his hands and taking a long look all round. The sky was perfectly clear, only just over the top of Pike's Peak lay the very faintest suspicion of a cloud.

Jack looked at this again and again, and then gave vent to a low whistle.

"It will storm some before morning," he declared. "Old Pike has not got his nightcap on for nothing. How much wood have we got in the shanty?"

"Not very much," I answered. "You know you said you would cut up more to-morrow for the baking. But it's silly thinking we are going to have any more snow, with all this sunshine and beautiful clear sky."

But his only reply was a request that I should get off the wood pile, adding:

"I guess I shall have to spend the rest of the afternoon cutting up ties, and I am afraid you, poor old girl, will have to go round to the corral and milk!"

At this speech I made a grimace, but needs must when a certain person drives, and a few moments saw me, pails in hand, sadly taking my way to the corral in weary anticipation of having eight cows to milk. I never learnt to milk well, and some of the most miserable moments of my life out West were spent with my head, in its

oldest hat, firmly pressed into the side of some old cow brute, who was obstinately refusing to give down her milk. Probably it was as unhappy a time for the unfortunate animal in question as it was for me, and I will say for the boys that they never allowed me to do it when it could be helped; there was no help for it this evening, however, Jack was cutting up ties, and the other boy was out with the waggon in the buck pasture feeding the inside cattle; and I must say as I sat there I could not help feeling a little vexed with Jack. It seemed totally unnecessary under such a sky and sunshine to make a fuss over the wood; we had plenty to last till the morrow, he knew how I hated milking, and it was absurd to take so much notice of a stupid little cloud like the one over the Peak. It was getting chilly, too, by the time I had done with one or two of the cows, and the keen, cold, frosty air began to catch my hands, wet as they were with the warm milk trickling down them into the pail; but I went steadily on exchanging one cow for another, until the best part of my distasteful task was over, never looking up till I heard the waggon coming back at high speed; and then, as I did so, I saw there were little black clouds chasing each other across the sky, and long shadows on the snow where all had been before brilliant sunshine. Presently, too, something stung me on my cheek—it was a bit of sleet—and another and another rattled against the side of the pail. There was no mistake about the matter now, it was going to storm after all.

The boys were confabbing together. I could hear their voices, and presently they came up and sent me indoors. I ran up to the shanty, drying my unfortunate hands as I went, and found Jack had cut a huge pile of wood whilst I had been milking, but had not had time to take it in; and as the sleet was coming down slowly still, and the clouds gathering overhead, I set to work and stored the cut-up logs under the shelf in the outer kitchen. Then I made up a good fire and set on the kettle for supper, lit the lamp, pulled the crimson curtains across the windows, and went outside to have another look at the weather. There was no sleet now, and very little wind, but the snow had begun, and was falling silently in large flakes; the wood pile was already whitened over, and so were the shingles of the roof, but the little shanty itself looked quite warm and cosy with the red glow from the curtained windows; so

as I still heard the boys busy in the corral, I went in and proceeded to get supper ready. The beef in the pail of water had quite thawed out by this time, but there was a coating of ice on the top of the water which made the taking of it out a very cold business indeed. Then I cut some up with potatoes and onions to stew for the morrow's breakfast, and cut the rest into slices to fry with bacon and potatoes for supper, the beef being so lean that a little bacon was a great improvement to it. Next I put an apple tart into the oven; made a little hot biscuit, of which the boys were very fond; and put the coffee and milk on to boil; and just then Jack rushed in and declared they would be in to supper in ten minutes, and asked if I had a ball of string—English string, for the stuff we got in the little city was apt to break easily.

"Only one ball left," I replied, a little grudgingly, for I wanted to keep it for parcels, and I knew that if the boys once got it out in the corral I stood a very poor chance of ever seeing my ball again. "Supper won't be ready for half an hour, however, Jack, for I have been busy getting the wood indoors."

"There's a good girl," was the reply. "I was afraid we should have that little job to do after supper, and you can bet your bottom dollar it's going to snow all it knows how to-night. Got any pitch-pine in for kindling?"

"Everything," I answered proudly; "look at this!"

And my improvised wood pile evidently met with great approval; even the fact that supper would be half an hour late sank into insignificance, and the boys went in quite contentedly to have a wash and wait till the meal should be ready for them.

We did not sit long over supper that night, although as a rule we were in the habit of doing so, the work of the day being mostly over by that time; but to-night every one seemed to live in anticipation—and, to judge by the boys' faces, a by no means pleasant anticipation either—of what might be coming.

All was very silent and hushed round the shanty; there seemed to be no sounds in the air except when the passing trains on one or another of the railway tracks rushed past with a wild shriek and a long trail of flaming smoke behind it, for all the world as if the trains were running a race with something. They had, every one of them, their snow ploughs on, and whirled away

east and west at a far more rapid pace than usual, the engines giving defiant snorts, the forces of civilisation arrayed for battle against the forces of nature, and trusting that old dame would not be too strong for them this time. After supper we all went and stood at the door looking out upon the track. The snow had actually cleared off a bit, and a flickering moon was up, the rails gleaming brightly here and there in the unsteady light.

Presently, with much ringing of its bell, and hooting of its cattle horn, the six-thirty came along on the Santa Fé track, the engine belching out a long trail of fire and smoke behind it, and dropping red-hot cinders along the line as it went; to our surprise, however, it slowed down on passing the ranch, and we saw a black object suddenly projected from one of the cars on to the bank, then the train, for it was a freight one, got up speed, and steamed swiftly away.

"Some poor brute who could not pay his fare been 'fired,' I guess," said Jack. "We shan't escape this time, the ranch is far too near the track for that; and, hang it all," he cried, with some energy, "I wouldn't turn a dog out on such a night as this is going to be."

And, sure enough, the black heap got up, shook itself, and made for us at once. There was no help for it, as the boys had said, we were bound to provide food and shelter, so they gave him a gruff welcome—we did not stand much on ceremony out West—and I took him in and got some fresh supper, and put the blankets upon the extra bed in the boys' room. For our little shanty only consisted of four rooms, two small and two larger, one of the last being the boys' room and the other the kitchen, whilst the two smaller were mine and the little sitting-room used chiefly on Sundays. There was also a lean-to at the back which made an outer kitchen, and where, in the summer, we kept the cooking stove. Presently the boys, who had been down to the corral, came in, and reported all was safe for the night, and then they had a smoke with the stranger, who turned out to be a fellow-countryman, hailing from Alabama, stony broke, and counting the ties in search of work; but he looked quite personable after a wash and brush-up. I left them to their smokes and went off to bed, where I was soon sleeping soundly, for I was very tired, faintly hearing the boys open the door and take a look at the weather the last thing. However, I only slept soundly at first, all the night

seemed disturbed with strange sounds; the wind howled and tore round the shanty, once a shingle came whirling down off the roof, and all the night through something soft kept sweeping and swashing against the window. When I woke I felt as if I had overslept myself, and yet the little room was almost dark; but I heard the boys' voices in the kitchen as they started, as I thought, the stove, and I knew it must be getting time to get up. Presently came a determined knock at my door, and a voice enquiring if I "knew what time it was?" And on my answering sleepily that I supposed it to be somewhere about six, I heard, to my utter astonishment, that it had gone nine, and that there was some hot water and a cup of coffee waiting outside my door. I hastily slipped on my dressing-gown and lit a candle, for it was still very dark, and enquired, as I took the water in, what was the matter.

"Matter? A blizzard is the matter, old girl," was Jack's response. "Get up at once; you never saw such a sight in your life. And, I say, we want some breakfast."

"All right," I replied, "I won't be long. You are a good boy to make some coffee. Stick the porridge and beef stew on the stove, will you?"

And I eagerly looked out, and in the intervals of dressing, flattened my nose against the window-pane, but there was nothing to be seen, except what looked, as far as I could tell, like whirling masses of darkness. I had often heard and been told of blizzards and the harm they did, but this was the first time we had any of us experienced one, and I wondered what we should do and how we should get on. Evidently the trains were not running, for nothing rushed past shaking the little shanty, and no cattle horns or bells were to be heard; all was stillness and a sort of heavy darkness. No coyotes were to be heard either, nothing but the wind howling round and lashing itself against the house. How thankful I was now, that Jack had insisted upon cutting up that wood the night before, and that we had so much food in the place, for I had heard that these storms sometimes lasted for days; and then I thought how far more thankful our unbidden guest must be that he was safe under shelter in such weather as this. By this time I was dressed, and went into the kitchen, not unpleasantly excited, but found the boys looking grave enough. It was no joke to them, poor fellows, they knew full well the damage such a storm

was likely to do amongst the outside cattle on the range, and quite half of ours had been turned out that winter; there was never a blizzard but some harm came to the cow brutes, and as they had invested a good deal of their capital on the animals, it meant an anxious time. Even if the "inside" cattle were lucky enough to escape all ill effects, some of those turned out on the range were sure to come to grief, although the full extent of the mischief done would never be known till the snow cleared off and it was time for the spring "round-ups."

The lamp was lit, and, after a fashion, the breakfast-table laid, so we proceeded to take that meal, but it was a very solemn quartette that sat down to it, and when it was over we all made for the door and looked out again at the weather. For me, I had never seen such a sight, if sight it could be called, for all was a sort of grey blackness; even the wood pile, which was only ten feet from the door, could only be distinguished as a shapelessness of denser blackness, whilst all the other outbuildings, which were close to the shanty, had altogether disappeared from human eye; the air itself was full of soft whirling masses of very fine snow, which the wind drove before it, moaning and shrieking round every corner of the house as it did so; and struck by a sudden thought, I exclaimed, "Oh, where is the dairy, Jack?—nearly all the food is there!" to which he responded drily, that he supposed they would have to try and dig it out presently, but that they must get to the corral and attend to the cattle first. However, our visitor came to the rescue then, and suggested he should try and dig out a path to it. Needless to say we were only too glad to accept his offer, only the difficulty was to find out where the dairy really was; there was nothing to be seen beyond arm's length, and it seemed so ridiculous to go groping for it when one knew that all the time the building was only a couple of hundred yards away. As for finding the corral, which was still further, the boys had taken the precaution overnight to tie one end of the ball of string to the gate of it, and the other end to one of the posts of the well, which stood under shelter just outside the kitchen door; and armed with buckets, they floundered across the snow, for come what might, the crack of doom itself, the Western cow brute must be attended to. The dairy being fortunately on the way to the corral, they escorted our friend and his spade and

lantern so far, leaving me alone in the shanty, in the middle of the thick greyness that looked to me like the end of all things.

I turned indoors to see what work could be done in my department, feeling very strange and eerie, a feeling which the sight of the lamplit breakfast-table did not tend to disperse. However, at some stages life will not bear thinking about, the only safety is to get up and find something to do; so I set to work, and presently, as I saw cups and saucers in their usual places in the cupboard, and the kitchen tidied up, I felt better; but when all the work of the little shanty was done, and I sat down by the stove, the heavy atmosphere began to depress me again. All the stories I had ever read or heard of blizzards crowded into my memory to keep each other company. Stories of ruined ranchmen, whose dead cattle were found piled up in heaps when the snow had melted; stories of cowboys overtaken on the prairies by the treacherous snowstorm, and found, long days after, with coyote-eaten bodies. Stories of starved folk whose food was in dug-outs, not twenty yards from their shanty, and yet could not be found. Stories of trains, blizzard-bound in deep cuttings, where no food or succour could be obtained. All these and many others surged into my brain, and amongst them a peculiarly horrible one about a young couple in a lonely shanty. How the man had gone out, as my boys had just now, to find his way to the corral, and how the snow had come down faster than ever, wrapping the shanty round and round so that he never found his way home; and how the poor young wife stood at the door, the lamp in her hand, calling to him again and again to let him know where the house was. How at first, for some time, came answering calls, and she shrilly shouted on and on, hoping and hoping, till at last there came no answering cry in return to hers; and how friends, coming afterwards to look them up, found the stiffened corpse of a man not a hundred yards from his own door, and inside the shanty a mad girl continually wailing out her husband's name. This was so cheering that I jumped up and set to work again, until my nerves quieted down, giving place to a matter-of-fact feeling of satisfaction that, despite the blizzard, the duties of the day were being got steadily through. Several times I went to the door and looked out. The wind had abated a little, although the snow still fell, and it was not perceptibly lighter, but I could hear now the cattle in the corral;

that seemed almost like company! Twelve o'clock struck. In half an hour it would be dinner-time, but where the dinner would be unless the dairy was dug out, I could not say, and yet those poor boys would be quite done up, and so hungry! So I went to the pantry to see what I had in the house. Meat there was none, but I had a ham destined for a Christmas treat, and some eggs, there was also bread and jam, and as I felt the day required something extra, I opened a can of sweet-corn and put it on to stew with a little butter, pepper, and salt. It was not, however, till two o'clock that they came in, up to their eyes in snow, and perfectly breathless and spent with floundering through it. All the cattle were safe, and the horses also. Our new chum had got at the dairy, so we had plenty of food, and when the animals had been looked to again after dinner, we shut up for the night after a last look round.

It was only a quarter to four, but it was now pitch-dark, thick darkness, "a darkness that could be felt," I murmured, remembering a sentence in a certain old book as the fine powdery snow whirled round us. All train traffic had ceased, and there was silence everywhere; except for certain muffled sounds from the corral, all was silence and darkness. And then we shut the door and settled down rather silently for a long evening, until our new chum started us singing, and Jack, who rather fancied himself on the banjo, got down that instrument and treated us to some of his finest efforts in the musical line. But there was a great treat in store for us when it came to the stranger's turn, for he possessed a very good tenor voice, and anything like his singing of plantation songs I have seldom heard. We listened entranced to "In the Old Kentucky Home," with its plaintive refrain of "Hard times, hard times, hard times come again no more," and we felt balls in our throat over "'Way down upon the Swanee Ribber." It clearly would not do to think too much of the "old folks at home" that night. In my mind's eye rose the vision of a warm and lighted room, and well-known faces round the tea-table. I could even see the bits of geranium and heliotrope in the flower vases, and hear the merry chatter over nothing at all that went on at that time. But I awoke to the contemplation of a deal table and a smoky lamp, three bearded men fiercely sucking at their pipes and gazing vacantly at the alabastined log

walls of the shanty. This would never do. I felt like Mark Tapley that now or never was the time to be jolly, and begged our new friend to sing something cheerful, whereupon he plunged into the following plantation ditty, which I jotted down, as I had never heard it before, and never have since :

Oh, it's dashing and a-splashing of the steamboat wheels,

Fo' I am boun' to go ;

An' it's clar the decks fo' who comes next

To de lan' whar de cotton tree grow.

To de lan', to de lan',

Fo' de tide is rising fast, an' de boat is off at last,

An' de gentlemen are drinking down below.

Oh, it's pulling an' a-pulling at de rope from de bank,

Fo' I am boun' to go ;

An' it's haulin' an' a-squalling at the gaugway plank,

In de lan' whar de cotton tree grow.

In de lan', in de lan',

Fo' de tide is rising fast, an' de bar will soon be past,

An' de gentlemen are drinking down below.

When I come to the dock about one o'clock,

Whar I am boun' to go,

My true love she will stan', with her bonnet in her hand,

In de lan' whar de cotton tree grow.

In de lan', in de lan',

I oh, de tide is rising fast, an' de boat is off at last,

An' de gentlemen are drinking down below.

The tune of this plantation ditty had the customary plaintiveness and brightness of the usual negro songs, turning quickly into vivacity whenever the occupation of the gentlemen "down below" was mentioned in the refrain, and the air itself was so catching that we went to bed with it ringing in our ears. The boys raked out and relaid the stove ready for the morning, and conveyed the oven shelf, neatly wrapped in an old blanket, into my room for me to sleep upon, for I felt the cold bitterly at nights; and the last thing I heard as I sank to sleep was Jack's voice—the dear fellow had not much idea of tune—growing out :

For de tide is rising fast,

An' de boat is off at last,

An' de gentlemen are drinking down below.

And then I fell asleep, and slept, I do not know how long, but when I awoke it was to see bright sunshine streaming into the room—the dreadful blizzard was over. I peeped into the kitchen; the stove was "going" bravely, coffee was boiling, and an egg put handy to follow its example, the table was covered with the debris of an impromptu breakfast, and the clock was striking nine. I had slept it round, that was certain, and the boys, instead of waking me, had got their own breakfast and gone out, so I seized upon the tin kettle and soon made my toilet, and rushed to the kitchen door, whence I gazed out upon the

world in astonishment; not so much that all was snow, but that all the familiar landmarks had disappeared. Where was the dug-out; where were the dairy and fowl-house? Where, to go further afield, was the railway track? The only things that stood out from the universal white counterpane which covered the earth, were the telegraph poles that ran alongside of the Denver and Rio Grande, and even of these one or two were broken down. As for the whiteness of the scene, no words of mine can describe it; it hurt the eyes, and for a moment or two after I returned to the kitchen I suffered from snow-blindness.

It was sunny and warm enough outside in the bright sunshine; the great peaks of the Rockies stood out against an intense blue sky; the pine-trees up the sides of the foothills were loaded down with snow; yet, when the sun uncovered that peaceful-looking expanse what tragedies of man and beast might not be brought to light, what untold tales of suffering and want might not have been inflicted by the blizzard that had just swept over the prairie! And to return to ourselves, what loss of capital might not have overtaken us? I dreaded to think of it all; so many of our friends had, we knew from past tales, lost almost their little all at such times. What might not fate have in store for us when the springtime came? No one had given us very cheering accounts of ranching in that part of the Great West, and yet it meant so much to us that we should get on and do well, which seemed almost impossible in the face of the fact that others with far more experience had gone stony broke, or only made just enough to grub on from day to day in a hand-to-mouth fight for existence. Not but what I thought, and think still, that one could have made a decent enough living out of the ranch, but we all wanted to make our pile and go home and spend it. We were all young and wanted to make money quickly, and it was not at all the place for that, a rougher life further West would have been better; but still we had bought the ranch, selling it again would, we found already, be a very different matter. For many of the settlers round, however, who came of the class of the English agricultural labourer who had emigrated whilst young, the place was simply a little earthly paradise. They had meat—butterer's meat—three times a day; they had cattle to milk, and horses to ride; their numerous sons and daughters

were no more burdens and helpless mouths to be fed, but embryo ranch hands and milkmaids, each capable on reaching a certain age of taking up land and adding thus to the family estate. Jack was as good as his master, and perhaps a little better, whilst every girl had the chance of settling down in life, as she would, for women were fairly scarce, and much needed for housekeepers. But for Englishmen of another class, the place was "played out"; what money there was in was no longer counted by dollars, but saved carefully cent by cent. Some of the people round made money by what they were pleased to call taking pupils, in which case a man paid a certain sum a year, and his son was allowed the free run of the ranch, and the privilege of milking and ploughing, with the glory of 'loping round several square miles of prairie on a bucking cowpony, equipped in all the bravery of leathern shapps, cowboy's hat, gloves and whip, with a brand-new lariat neatly coiled round the horn of his Mexican saddle. Such a fate we found our new friend's had been. His people in England had paid for him for a year, and at the end of the time there was no work to be had; he had been on the wander ever since, working in the summer, and living Heaven knows how through the bitter winter months, and in his pride sending letters home at intervals to say how well he was getting on. He spoke of moving that evening, and asked a little diffidently if we had any work to give him. Alas, there was none, but for the time he could stay and help repair the damage done to the fencing by the blizzard; some of the shingles, too, had been blown off the roof of the shanty. As for the cattle, one of the cows in the buck pasture had fallen down, and been so cruelly treated by its companions that it had to be shot. We felt we were lucky so far that it was only one, but some of our neighbours had not been so fortunate, and each day brought in some fresh tale of disaster to men or cattle. Of course the harm of what had happened on the range was not known for many a day after; when we did know our full loss, we looked back with horror on the blizzard. Long before that, however, our strange guest had "moved on," and we never saw or heard anything more of him. He promised to write, and I think would have done so had he anything pleasant to tell. But he drifted out of our lives as he had drifted into them one winter's day, and we saw the last of him

on the Santa Fé track just before it rounded the curve, a shabby figure in grey with his bundle on his back, waving an equally shabby cowboy's hat in a mute farewell.

TWO WEST INDIAN AMAZONS.

AMONG the numerous romances which have been located in the West Indies, it is doubtful if there be any more striking than the true stories of the lives of two real women—Anne Bonney and Mary Read, whose very names are now almost forgotten in Jamaica itself. The career of each of these women was remarkable enough separately; but what was still more remarkable was the manner in which their fates became interjoined.

The story takes us back to the days of the picaroons and buccaneers, whose doings have inspired so many romancists, and the facts of whose lives were, perhaps, not less strange than the fictions that have been woven out of them.

Notable in the spacious harbour of Port Royal, Jamaica, is a verdant promontory known as Gallows Point, so called because it was the place on which so many of the sea-robbers of old met their doom at the hand of outraged law. There numberless picaroons and buccaneers have expiated their crimes; the picaroon being the rascal on the large and unblushing scale, while the buccaneer—at first, at any rate—had a colourable pretext for existence in a sort of chartered privilege to rob the Spaniards as much as possible. In fact the buccaneer was an ostensible trader before he degenerated into a pirate. The celebrated Morgan belonged to this persuasion—he, the poor Welsh boy, who, after escaping from slavery in Barbados, became one of the boldest "privateers" of the seventeenth century, who attacked Panama, pillaged the place of enormous treasure, was knighted for his success there, and was afterwards appointed Governor of Jamaica. A very different fate befell, in later times, other buccaneers; but it is to be remembered of Morgan that he did not practise the cruelties only too common in his profession.

One of the most notorious of the picaroons was Blackbeard, whose body was destined to decorate Gallows Point. Another, scarcely less celebrated in his day, was Captain Rackham, who ended his career on a gibbet on a coral islet near Jamaica, thereafter known as Rackham Cay—Cay being a

word of Spanish derivation, frequently applied in the West Indies to small islands. And it is concerning this picaroon of Rackham Cay that our story has to do.

Captain Rackham had run short of hands, and, in fact, seems to have been in rather reduced circumstances generally, when, in 1720, he put into Negril Bay in the hope of picking up recruits. There he invited on board some nine of the crew of a French fishing-boat, and was regaling them with rum punch, when a British pirate-chaser hove round the point. Rackham slipped his anchor and made sail with the nine fishermen on board. He was captured, however, brought into Port Royal, tried at an Admiralty Assizes, and condemned to be hung, along with eight of his own crew. The Frenchmen were tried later for "constructive piracy"—that is, aiding and abetting a notorious pirate—and they also were hanged. But there were two other persons on board the pirate vessel who also came up for trial with the picaroons, and who only escaped sentence by disclosing themselves as women. These women were Anne Bonney and Mary Read.

Anne Bonney was the wife of Captain Rackham, and well suited she was to be a pirate's bride. Her father had been an Irish attorney, who deserted a wife and family in Cork and eloped to South Carolina with a servant-girl, whom he there married. He made a fortune as a planter, and Anne—the daughter of the servant-girl—was much courted by the young planters of Carolina, both for the money that would be hers and for her good looks. But she loved a sailor, and having married him against her father's orders, was banished from the parental roof. The young couple made their way to New Providence, the gathering place at that time of all discontented beings, and Anne, to accustom herself to a life of adventure, put on man's clothes.

At first she lived with her child on one of the outer islands while Captain Rackham roamed the seas; but by-and-by she shipped with him as one of the crew, and accompanied him in all his depredations. She was, in fact, accounted the most courageous and fearless of the ship's company, and she was the last to yield at the capture off Negril Bay above related. It is said that when allowed to visit her husband to say good-bye before he was led to the scaffold, her parting words were a rebuke—that had he but fought like a man before he was taken, he would not have been led away to be hanged like a dog.

The story of Mary Read is still more romantic. Her mother was an English girl who, when very young, married a sailor belonging to a good family. He went off once on a voyage from which he never returned, leaving her with one little boy-child. She was not faithful to his memory, and a girl-child was born to her, but to conceal the fact from her husband's family, she repaired to a distant part of the country for two or three years. There the legitimate boy died, and she was driven to the expedient of passing off the illegitimate girl in his place. Thus it was that Mary Read was first dressed in those male garments that she was destined to wear during most of her life.

Mary was presented to her mother's mother-in-law, and accepted by her as her grandson. So long as the grandmother lived there was an allowance of five shillings a week for the child, but, when the old lady died, Mary had to work for a living. She took a situation as foot-boy, or page, with a French lady, and in that capacity travelled a good deal. Tiring of service she tried the sea for a time, but abandoned that for soldiering during the war in Flanders.

First she joined an infantry regiment, but soon changed into the cavalry, and fought splendidly under Marlborough. The fortune of war sent her a comrade in the shape of a good-looking young Flemish soldier, with whom she fell violently in love. It was a delicate matter to make known her sex and her sentiments, but her woman's wit rose above her garb, and the two were publicly married by the regimental chaplain. Their romantic story brought them a shower of money presents, with which they started an inn. But the Flemish did not live long, and Mary, finding business not a congenial occupation, sold up the concern, disguised herself once more, and re-entered the army. She fought at Ramillies and Oudenarde and Malplaquet, and only gave up the pursuit of military glory when the peace of Utrecht disbanded the forces. By that time she was a very expert swordswoman.

Cut off from soldiering, and having as little inclination as ever for humdrum occupations, Mary determined to try the sea again. She booked as a sailor on board of a Dutch vessel bound for the West Indies. There the ship was taken by pirates, and she, being English, was asked to join the fraternity known as the "Brethren of the Coast." She was quite ready and willing. She had become accustomed to a sea life; she loved adventure; and, though gentle-hearted, was not much troubled with conscience.

So she shipped under Captain Rackham as a picaroon, and now a strange thing happened. Anne, the Captain's disguised wife, fell in love with the good-looking new hand, and sought "his" society so much as to make Rackham furiously jealous. Anne, in confidence, told Read that she was a woman, whereupon Mary had to make a similar confession! It was a queer position, but after an exchange of experiences, the two girls agreed to tell the Captain, as his jealousy was becoming too serious. Captain Rackham was the only person on board who knew that two of his "hands" were women.

It is said that he was, even before he knew her sex, somewhat puzzled that one so quiet and gentle-looking as Mary Read should have voluntarily enlisted with pirates, and one day asked her why she continued to run the risk of a felon's death. She said it was because all pirates were brave, and that courageous men have to starve on shore. "To my choice," she is reported to have said, "the penalty for a pirate's life should not be less than death, for it is the fear of a felon's death that keeps dastardly men out of the service. Those ashore who cheat widows and rob orphans, and are just bold enough to oppress their neighbours because they are too poor to seek justice, would be robbing at sea. A crowd of rogues would be plundering if pillage had no dangers; merchants would be deterred from venturing a valuable cargo afloat; free-booting would be a trade not worth following. The rewards of piracy are only for the brave!"

Such were the reputed sentiments of this remarkable person, who clearly knew what she was about when she elected to sail under the "Jolly Roger."

But even under the Black Flag the little god may throw his darts, and it came to pass that one day Captain Rackham's company received an addition in the person of a hand-ome young carpenter. He was one of the crew of a "prize," and he elected, like Mary, to throw in his lot with the pirates, who were truly glad to have him, since carpenters were not very plentiful in "the service," and it was often difficult enough to effect repairs. Mary at once fell over head and ears in love with him, and she did a desperate thing in order to secure his attention.

One day there was a quarrel among the crew, which ended in one of them challenging the carpenter to fight a duel. Mary knew that such encounters always ended in the death of one of the com-

batants, and she determined to prevent her beloved from fighting. So she deliberately insulted his challenger before the whole ship's company, and on being challenged in turn, insisted that the last insult should be wiped out before the first. As a cavalry soldier she had acquired remarkable skill with the sword, and she knew that she was superior to any ordinary antagonist. She met her man, she fought, and after a few passes ran him through and laid him dead at her feet.

This exploit naturally led to explanations with the carpenter, with the result that they became man and wife. Thus were there two married couples on board this strange pirate craft, and nobody knew of the fact but the two couples themselves!

Not only that, but these two women pirates were the most adventurous and courageous members of the whole crew. There was little of the woman about either of them, but Mary Read was the more womanly and sentimentally inclined of the two. She was probably also the more emotional, as she was also the more deep in her affections.

They were both condemned along with the rest of the pirate gang, but were reprieved on their sex being made known. Mary Read died in her cell soon afterwards. For Anne Bonney intercession was made by influential colonists who had known her father, and who remembered her in her innocent girlhood. She was released and her subsequent history is unrecorded. It is said that she showed no emotion at the execution of her husband, whose body was hung in chains on Rackham Cay, along with his two chief officers, as a terror to all free-booters. After ornamenting Rackham Cay for a couple of years, the gibbet was swept away in the great hurricane of 1722, and on a portion of the wreck of the scaffold a negro, who had been washed overboard from one of the vessels in the harbour, floated ashore.

Thus the last use of the notorious pirate was to save a life after his own death!

Since then all trace of Rackham and his companions has disappeared, and the name is only known to navigators of our time as indicating one of the landmarks in making Port Royal. What became of the children of these two remarkable couples is not recorded. In 1822 the capture of the notorious "Zaragonaza," with her desperate crew of ruffians commanded by Aragonéz, marked the end of buccaneering and picarooning in these waters. On that occasion the gibbet on Gallows Point was extended to hold sixteen freebooters in a row.

THE SEA-GULL.

THE pale, pathetic sunshine on park and pleasure
lay.
Where Whaddon stood serene and proud in the soft
November day;
The fragile roses lingering upon each drooping stalk,
Guarded, with purple heather bell, the ordered garden
walk.
And where the water shimmered, beneath the yellow-
ing tree,
Upon his rock the sea-gull sate dreaming of the sea.
From Leicestershire's fair uplands, from his sheltered
inland home,
His spirit flew where wide and wild tossed the broad
leagues of foam.
He saw the glitter of the surge flash from the rolling
waves,
He heard the breakers thundering, deep in the rocky
caves,
He saw the cliff side, grim and stern, where he so fain
would be,
The lonely sea-gull on the rock, still dreaming of the
sea.
He heard the "shouting" of the birds that from the
eyrie swept,
With whirr and swoop of broad grey wings, where
their prey below them leapt;
Above the lavish food they brought, the keen, black
eyes grew dim;
The stately swan that glided by was never mate for
him;
Better the wildest ocean storm, than the sunniest
land-locked sea;
So on his rock the sea-gull stood dreaming of the sea.

MOLLIE AHEARNE.

A COMPLETE STORY.

OF all the robes woven at the silent
looms of God to clothe the round world
withal, I love the royal purple of the
heather best; and nowhere does it grow in
such glory of beauty as where Corrin Hill
slopes down to the village of Gurtene and
the great Atlantic. There it seems to
tumble down the hillside in billows that
sweep over and around the red projecting
rocks, and only now and then you get a
glimpse of the golden gorse, where it
lifts its head above the gorgeous flood;
while the big bells of crimson-purple and
the little bells of lilac, whispering to each
other in the sun the secrets the west wind
brings in from the sea, make for your ears
all the music of rushing water. There is
white heather, too, if you know where to
look for it; little Mollie Ahearne showed
me where it was when I was a boy and she
a barefooted child. She knew every stone
on the hill, I think, for she lived in the
cottage you can make out from the sea,
nestling near the top in a sharp hollow like
some giant heel-mark. And it is her story
I would tell.

She lived with her uncle—or grand-uncle,
rather—old Shamus Ahearne, who had
saved money, they said, and would rather
die than spend a farthing of it. He was a

cross old man, with a hard word for every-
body, except Mollie, and a universal dis-
trust of men and things, that seemed to his
neighbours to be a sign of comparative
sympathy with the Evil One. I remember
he would come to the door of his cottage
when I passed, and shake his great black-
thorn stick at me, just for the sake of
shaking it at something. That was the
ethical code which he adopted; he was
always shaking his stick, literally or meta-
phorically, at something. Only one class of
society escaped this almost all-inclusive
brandishing, and that was the priesthood of
his creed. Before that he bowed his surly
old head, and for its welfare he was even
ready, comparatively ready, to give some of
his hoardings, and when the parish priest
held a "station" at the hillside cottage,
Owld Shamus celebrated a sort of church
festival. Things were done in style, I can
tell you, on these occasions. There wasn't
a curate then, even, that had to sit on a
kitchen chair, or to feed himself with a
steel fork. No; he would hire the horse-
hair chairs from the bedrooms in Flynn's
hotel, and the brassy forks the worthy
Peter Flynn called his "silver."

"Deed, ye'd think," Ned Gallagher, the
stone-breaker, once said to me, "ye'd think
'twas the way owld Shamus had two sowls
to save, 'stead av wan little kanawn av a
thing that the divil himself would hardly
miss!"

I never could quite make out why he
adopted his grand-niece; perhaps she saved
him a servant. He liked her in a queer,
crabbed way of his own, I used to think;
but afterwards it seemed that she was only
a useful article to him, an investment of
capital that was to repay the outlay by con-
tributing to the saving of his soul; for
Mollie was destined to be given to the holy
sisterhood. All his money was to go with
her, and surely, if he bestowed such a gift
upon a pious institution, there would be no
lack of masses for his soul. But he put off
the time when he should make his unselfish
offering, partly, I think, because of the
personal inconvenience her absence would
entail, and partly, perhaps, because the girl
showed less than no predisposition for the
vocation. Not that she wasn't as good as
gold; you couldn't meet her big grey eyes
without knowing that; and from the time
she was a slip of a colleen, playing "Hunt
the Fox" with Con Ronan and Teddy
Coyne and the rest round the whitewashed
school-house in the village, she never
missed mass of a Sunday morning or saint's

day. This, no doubt, was in part the doing of the crafty old man, yet I still remember her demure, downcast eyes, so different from the merry girl of weekdays, when I would meet her coming from first mass on my way to church. She had the intensely religious temperament of her race, and was very emphatically Irish; half her religion was superstition, and superstition half her religion. But she had no leaning towards life in a convent. I think, indeed, she was in such awe of the holy sisters that the idea filled her with a sort of terror.

She was but a slim girl of twenty when Con Ronan wanted to marry her. He was a big fellow, five or six years her senior, with crisp black hair growing thickly on his small head, and keen, dark blue eyes. "A fine figure av a man, glory be to God, an' divil another in it to bate him," was the universal opinion. But Con wasn't prosperous. He had a boat of his own in the bay, and he was the most daring of all fishermen, but he never took to anything seriously—except, perhaps, poaching. His chiefest friend was Teddy Coyne, a merry soul, who loved to join in the expeditions up the Brusna, that emptied itself into the ocean at the east end of the village, to "stroke-haul" a salmon with the murderous three-hooks in some quiet pool, or make the pheasants drunk with corn steeped in whisky. Con made these expeditions with an eye to business as well as sport, but Teddy only went, as he said himself, "for blackguardin'," for his father was a well-to-do farmer. They both had known Mollie Ahearne since their childhood, but, as time went on, "Black Con," as he was called, grew to think more of her than anything else—"even than a spring salmon," mourned Teddy to me, rubbing his red hair disconsolately.

Teddy would have offered his own silly, true heart and freckled hand to the girl if his hero had not taken the field before he contemplated it very seriously. As it was, his one thought was to further Con's wooing and establish him in the good graces of old Shamus; and to do this he would turn in of an evening to the old man and his niece, and sit by the hearth, launching out into high-flown eulogium of his friend.

"Deed now, 'tis he's the steady boy," he'd say, ignoring the fact that they had got a couple of brace of hares the night before; "I'm tellin' ye, Misther Ahearne, sor, ye'll see him taxt-gatherer, or wather-bailiff, or some of thim things before he stops. The likes av him is great!" And

he would screw up all his face into a knowing, surreptitious wink at Mollie, while Shamus grunted sceptically.

After a few such visits as these it dawned on the old man that things were taking an unexpected turn with regard to his niece, and, after much brooding, he broached the subject one night. Mollie was kneading dough to bake bread in the "bastable" that stood by the hearth, with its broad flat cover ready to be piled up with glowing turf, hanging by it, and he was crouching under the great open chimney with his faithful blackthorn in his hand as usual. He was parted from it only when he was asleep, I believe; for, when it wasn't actually supporting him, he punctuated his frequent tirades with blows on the floor and virulent flourishes.

"Who's makin' a match fur ye wid that Ronan?" he asked suddenly.

The rolling-pin stopped short in its swift journeying across the deal table to the wall and back, and Mollie looked hard at the solitary candle that stood next her.

"No one," she said at last, putting back a lock of dark hair that had strayed over her forehead.

"Well thin," said Shamus, puffing at his pipe, with his head held high to keep the embers he had collected from falling out, "Teddy Coyne have a dale av talk about the same man, an' he have ivery look at you an' he saying it. I'm thinkin' there's been somethin' goin' on about ye."

The rolling-pin, that had begun to ply again, stopped half-way to the wall, and two small hands tightened on it. Mollie drew her breath quickly, and gathered courage to say what she had foreseen long since with dread she must some day say. Shamus went on with his pipe calmly enough, but scowling at the fire. His suspicions had been quite dispelled, for Mollie never told him a lie, and, to him, there was no such thing as marriage without a prolonged bout of match-making. Mollie knew well that her answer had satisfied him, that the thing she had to say would come quite unexpectedly, and that the storm it would raise would be twice as bad on that account.

"Con Ronan wants me to marry him——"

"He does? He does that?" cried Shamus, starting round. "Who towlt it t'ye?"

"He did himself."

"The divil carry his impidence," snarled the old man, thumping the hearthstone with his stick.

"An' I want to marry him," said Mollie, facing round; "an' I'll never have no one else," she added, taking advantage of the speechless astonishment on her uncle's face, and turning again to her work, she sent the rilling-pin on its way to and fro once more. But Shamus soon found his voice, and stood up to scream and stamp his stick at her. She was a bold, brazen piece, he shouted, and had no more gratitude than—a pipe-stem—and he'd see her stretched for wakin' on the table before he'd let her marry such rubbish. He hobbled up and down the kitchen, scolding and abusing at the top of his thin voice, striking the earthen floor from time to time as if to ram home his vituperation; and at last, telling her he'd see her married to a good match before the month was out, he left the room still scolding; and Mollie bowed her little dark head on the hard deal table, and sobbed her sorrow out to the Holy Mother.

There were sad days after that. Shamus set about making a match for his niece in earnest, and determined that if he could not present her as an offering of his own to the convent in Bantry, he must at least connect himself, by her marriage, with the priesthood. He had a vague notion, judging all mankind by his own warped and stunted standard, that he would in some way reap spiritual benefit by the transaction.

"There's Father Clancy," he pondered, as he started forth the next morning, "he have a little owld brother, goin' into the town av Banthry, wid niver a cross in the world to buy a bag av meale or a thing, widout axing for the loan av it. Sure, if I make the match wid his riverince, the man would be outlawed intirely if he wouldn't say a handful av masses fur me sowl—God have mercy on me—afther he knowin' 'twas I sot up the brother wid the gurl an' the fortune!"

And with these reflections he trudged to the neighbouring parish and spent a long day in the priest's bleak little parlour, throwing out crafty insinuations, and hinting that his niece was as good as promised to another—"a fine steady lump av a man, too"—but that it was his pious wish that his savings should, however indirectly, benefit the true Church and her sacred ministry; until the good priest wondered how such a self-denying piety could have lain dormant so long, and took his simple soul to task for setting down his visitor as the greatest hypocrite in the four parishes. However, Shamus must have been satisfied with his day's work, for, on his way home in the

evening, he overtook Judy Callaghan, on the bog road, walking behind a high-piled load of turf.

"Begob, he's mortal strong wid ye!" cried he, eyeing the emaciated nine-months-old donkey that staggered slowly along amid the odds and ends of rope that kept him between a shaft and a half.

"Arrah, what is he but a little foaleen?" said Judy, laboriously slewing him round to avoid a hole in the road by hauling the stumpy back-shaft in the opposite direction; "but he's the show to pull, for all. Hi, off, ye devil!" she added, bending to her work until the baby donkey, patiently crossing his tiny hoofs, was borne sideways across the road. "There's a lag there," she said, glancing back at the hole she had avoided successfully; "who is it have the mendin' av this bit av road?"

"'Tis Clancy—James Clancy—ma'am," answered Shamus, a trifle loftily, "over-right Horan's forge, goin' in the town av Banthry."

"Och! the little owld tinker! I know him well. 'Tis matchmakin' fur hissiff that fello' is all his time, an' ne'er a wan av thim will go to him. Fittier fur him throw his hand over a shevel an' scatter a thrashecawn av stones on roads that's killing the people!"

And Judy snorted as she stooped for a good black sod that had fallen from her load.

"I'd be tellin' ye, ma'am," said Shamus, nettled, "that the same man is gittin' a gurl an' a handy bit av fortune shortly. Maybe that'll knock the blatherin' out o' ye!"

And putting in the note of exclamation with a bang of his stick on the ground, he quickened his pace to leave her.

"Arrah, who is it, Shamus, alay!" cried Judy coaxingly after him.

"Maybe I'd be tellin' ye, indeed!" sniffed Shamus over his shoulder, and walked on. But before he went twenty yards further, his news grew too burdensome for him, and turning for a moment he shouted: "It's me naice, that's who it is, Mrs. Callaghan, ma'am!" and walked on again stamping his stick louder than ever.

"Yere naice? Molleen, aquid?" muttered Judy after his retreating figure. "Aha! That ye mightn't come back, me little owld waysle! I know what ye're afther as well as if I could see through yere back. Bad scan to ye an' the likes av ye—Heaven forgive me this night! Go on out o' that!" to the donkey; "twould take a day an' a man to dhraw a kitch av turf wid ye."

Shamus reached home just in time for

supper, and in a state of nervous tension that made his surly tones still more surly. He knew that he must break the news of her approaching marriage to his niece, and he rather dreaded the scene he foresaw would take place; for if you took away his sharp tongue and eloquent blackthorn, you left only a weak, peevish old man. As he came in, Mollie was laying the table for them both; not a laborious undertaking, as the service consisted of two bowls of "thick" milk, and a cracked salt-cellar of damp salt.

"Are they boiled?" demanded the head of the house fiercely, to assure himself of his own firmness.

"Ay, are they," said his niece quietly, but glancing round with some apprehension; for she knew when a domestic storm was about to break over her head by the tone of his voice, as well as she knew when the wind was rising by the scream of a white-winged gull sweeping inland for shelter.

Shamus ate his supper in silence, and when he had finished turned to the fire so that his back was to the girl. He lit his pipe slowly, for his hand trembled, and settling himself lower over the glow, said shortly:

"Ye'll be married to-morra fortnight; the match is made be meself an' Father Clancy east, so let me have no talk at all out av ye."

"An' who is it?" asked Mollie after a pause, in which Shamus puffed with noisy indifference at his pipe, and she let the table cloth she was holding gradually slip to the ground.

"James Clancy—the dacint man—on the side av the road, goin' into Bantdry. He have——"

"Is it that little owld fairy?" said Mollie contemptuously. "Sure I'd crack him like the handle av a musheroon between me finger and thumb. And mind, I'm tellin' ye," she added, drawing herself up to her slender height, "I'll marry ne'er a wan in it only Con Ronan!"

"Do I hear ye sayin' that?" cried the old man, jerking himself to his feet. "Marry that blackguard? That thafe av a poacher? I tell ye——" but his anger stopped him, and he could only bang the floor helplessly with his stick.

"If ye called him ivery blackguard an' thafe ye could think av, 'twouldn't make e'er a taste av differ to me," said Mollie very quietly. "'Tis him will carry me before the priest, an' no other," and before Shamus could extricate himself from his fury she was gone.

When he found himself alone his anger seemed to evaporate very quickly, and he sat himself on the high-backed red settle near the fire, resting his chin on the top of his stick. He had not been prepared for such a cool reception of his news; and he felt vaguely that things were worse even than he had anticipated. While he gazed into the turf glow with ill-tempered apprehension written on his hard, wrinkled face, the door opened quickly and a big man came in, a young man with keen blue eyes and rough black hair, who shut the door behind him and crossed the earthen floor to the fire. Shamus, looking round hastily, saw it was Black Con who stood by him—the man he had forbidden his niece to marry—and scowling at him from beneath his bristling eyebrows, asked him with a snarl what he wanted that time o' night.

"On'y wan word," answered Con, in a deep voice. "Is it thrue what owld Judy Callaghan is praichin' about—that you have the match med for Mollie wid Jamseen Clancy?"

"'Tis thrue as the Book. An' what call have ye leppin' in on me to ax me that? If ye have the supper ate 'tis a dale fitter for ye go to ye're bed!"

The younger man drew himself up, breathing thickly, with his hands held firmly clenched by his sides.

"She'll marry ne'er a boy but meself," he said slowly, "ye know that. But 'tis the money that's playin' on ye. All the parish knows 'tis Prashte's people are to have that—the devil carry every pinny av it from ye this blessed night!"

"Out av me sight," screamed Shamus, leaping up and striking out with his stick. "Ye common robber ye! Hit the road a welt, an' be quick, or——"

"Howld ye're stick!" said Black Con, sending the old man back to the settle with one shove; but he struggled to his feet, and would have struck again had not Mollie's trembling voice arrested him, and the girl herself appeared at the door that opened into "the room."

"Con, dear. Oh, Connie avic, go! In Heaven's name have no truck wid him!"

"Sure, I wouldn't touch him," said Con, backing out of reach of the stick; "an' I'll go too, quick enough. 'Tis no great things at all to take tay wid the likes av him. But never fear, Molleen, I'll git ye yit, in spite av his teeth!"

And Con shut the door after his retreating figure just in time to save himself from a blow that dented the wood.

Mollie slept but little that night in her bed up under the thatch. Indeed, it was not until long after she had heard her uncle go into the room below, where he slept, that weariness overcame sorrow and she rested. Once she started up, dreaming her lover's voice cried to her, calling her to come as if he were in trouble, but she only heard the sea wind moaning in the dusk of morning, and she slept again. An hour after sunrise she was down, as usual, to set fresh turf on the embers that lived all night under the thick grey ash. As she crossed the kitchen something lay on the floor near the window, and she picked it up. It was a little canvas bag she had made herself and given Con to hold his black cake of tobacco, and wondering she had not seen it the night before, she hid it in her bosom to give it back when she saw him. Then she turned to mend the fire, but stopped once more, for the window by the door was open—wide open and swinging out in the morning breeze. She paused to wonder how it came so, and pulled it to slowly at last, altogether at a loss to account for it. But it wouldn't fasten, for the hasp was gone, and the white wood showed where it had been cut out—neatly whittled away with some sharp instrument. Mollie gave a little scream when she saw this, and crossed quickly to the door of the room where Shamus slept. But then she stopped for a moment, and her grey eyes opened wide at a thought that flashed across her mind. She took out the little tobacco pouch again and looked at it as if she thought she might have mistaken it, and her eyes looked more frightened as she thrust it guiltily inside her dress once more. It must have been he! But why—for what could he have come? She would tell her uncle nothing, either of what she had found or that the hasp had been cut from the window. No, she would just wake him as usual as if nothing had happened, and, pushing the door open, she went in. She took but one step into the room and stopped as if turned to stone; then, in a moment, she was back in the kitchen, prone on the earthen floor, trying with both hands to shut her ears to her own screams. For in there Shamus Ahearne lay, with his grey head thrown back on his pillow and a horrid gash in his throat. And there were great stains on the white counterpane—crimson where the morning sun fell, and black in the shadow.

Just then, Ned Callaghan was climbing the hill, with his hammer tucked under one arm and his breakfast bundle under the

other, and the shrill screams from the little cottage struck his ear with such startling suddenness that he dropped both to hasten thither.

"In the name av th' Vargin, Mollie Ahearne childreen asthore, an' what the devil ails ye?" he cried, pushing open the door and standing over her.

"He's killed! Killed! Dead! with blood on him!" cried the girl, writhing where she lay. "Don't look at him! It's awful! Oh, uncle, avic, avic, is it gone from me ye are?"

"God have mercy on us all!" cried Ned, crossing himself. "Sure, I'll rise the counthry," and he hurried out muttering, "Sure, he was a cross little man, a mortal crabbed owld shtick; 'tis sorry I am I refused him the match he axed from me a' Sathurday. Begob, may be he have it all towld on me above be this. Heaven forgive me!"

When he was gone Mollie dragged herself to the door to get away from the awful presence of death, and then, as she sat, choking with sobs, an awful terror rushed over her. How did that little thing of Con's come to be in the cottage? He had said last night he wouldn't harm the old man, but—yes—she had seen him once so carried away by passion that he hardly—and, oh, Heaven! hadn't she dreamed of him calling her in a strange voice? And she bowed her head in misery. But they must never know—no one must know; and she stood up with a desperate look in her sad face as the sound of voices came up the hillside. On they poured, all the neighbours and half the village, until the cottage overflowed, and the awestruck crowd reached half-way down the borreen. Then came the priest, looking grave and with a kindly word for the girl now crouching by the hearth.

Soon the whispered questions grew louder, and people asked aloud: "Who did it?" And Mollie heard with a shudder the name "Black Con" whispered here and there, and then such phrases as "mortal black in a timper," "he have the fist wondhful ready an' he vexed," came to her ears; but she only clenched her teeth more firmly, and the hard, despairing look grew in her eyes.

Everybody seemed to know that "owld Judy" had told Black Con of the match made with James Clancy, and some one had seen him go to the cottage the evening before. Bridget Downey swore she "heerd 'em at it, an' she dhriiving home her goat at nightfall, an' seen th'owld man,"

God rist his poor sowl, makin' at Con, raal wicked, wid his shtick." That made them question Mollie about it.

"Haden't the two some bother last night?"

"No, they hadn't a word," answered Mollie firmly—very firmly. "Con Ronan wasn't in it since Sunday night," she told Sergeant McGuild. She would swear she hadn't seen him there since then, she said. But she never raised her eyes from the fire, or ceased to wring her hands together. Then it was Father Murphy, who had baptized and confirmed her, and to whom she had always confessed the little things that had seemed so wicked. What were they all to what she was doing now?

"My poor girl, wasn't the young man wid ye last night?" he asked.

But she never raised her eyes. She only trembled, for she loved the old man, and believed that to lie to him was to leave no sin unsinned. She hesitated for a moment—until Con's blue eyes and a tangled black curl that used to fall on his forehead arose before her—and she said distinctly:

"No, Father."

The awful day passed slowly. Shamus Ahearne was laid beneath a sheet on the deal table in the kitchen, and six candles stood ready to give him light when the sun went down. The country was scoured for Black Con, but neither he nor Teddy Coyne was found.

"He'll come of hisself when he hears av it," said Mollie, still watching the fire and straining her fingers together. Yet she hardly hoped even that he would.

But he never came up the mountain-side again—of himself. Only that night Teddy Coyne was there, sobbing like a child, and three sturdy fishers from Berehaven to help him with his tale.

"He had his mind set on goin'," sobbed Teddy. "He towlt me he'd go out av his sinses if he stopped ashore. 'Twas the little owld boat we carried, and on'y the two av ourselves in it. 'Tis little fishin' we done, for he on'y sat all night watchin' th' water; an' 'Teddy,' says he, 'd'ye hear the win'?' 'I do,' I says, for 'twas keenin' fit to break ye're heart. 'Tis me own story 'tis tellin' me,' says he. 'That's what I come out for,' says he, 'to listen to it.' An' in the dusk av the mornin' it came to blowin' a wisp av a mist, an' the Berehaven boat hit us. An—he—he was leanin' out watchin' the water, an' it must be the way he got shtruck in the head, for he on'y gives a little cry like for—for—some one—and we haven't found him yit."

"An' what time was it ye started?" some one asked.

"Early, indeed; the night was young, an' we going down to the beach. 'Twasn't bedtime at all, at all."

"God be praised!" said the priest, "the poor boy hasn't this sin on his sowl!"

And, as he spoke, the girl by his side rose to her feet, crying wildly, "Con asthore, asthoreen! Forgive me!" and fell senseless in his arms.

RICHENDA.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "The Thirteenth Brydaine," "Catherine Maidment's Burden," "Benefit of Clergy," "The Vicar's Aunt," etc. etc.

CHAPTER V.

SIR RODERICK GRAEME was a young man gifted with what may either be a blessing or a curse, "private means." In plain words, he had an income derived from some property in Scotland—an income just large enough to enable him to do what he called "enjoy life quietly." He lived in a luxurious bachelor flat with another man; and he spent his days in doing precisely what he liked, which was easy enough. But it was harder to get complete satisfaction out of the process; and this he very often failed to do. He rode, he drove, he had a house-boat, he went to everything to which he ought to go, and he entertained a great deal in a quiet way. He was very popular in society; nobody knew the exact extent of his income, and report, taking for text his luxurious life, had discoursed upon it and magnified it abundantly. Many a mother looked with longing, anxious eyes towards Sir Roderick as a possible anchor for one of her drifting daughters. Many a young woman who was managing her own affairs of a matrimonial nature, looked hopefully towards him as a possible resting-place after a struggle that had lasted through several seasons. He was so exactly the right thing, these eager ones would urge. Such a nice place in Scotland! Quite as steady as most young men, and a title!

But the efforts implied in these ungrammatical aspirations met with no success. Whether his life quite satisfied him or not, Sir Roderick had no intention of improving it by taking a partner to share in his bliss. His money was enough for one, he said, but not nearly enough for two; and he had never yet seen the woman for whose

sake he wished to starve. He was quite alone in the world, and had no ties, and the prospect of forming any grew year by year, evidently, further from his thoughts.

It was the absolute security he felt in her society that had led to his intimacy with Mrs. Fitzgerald. Their acquaintance had begun long ago, in Colonel Fitzgerald's lifetime, and after Mrs. Fitzgerald's widowhood Sir Roderick had slipped quite naturally into the position of "friend of the house." Sir Roderick Graeme was thoroughly well aware that Mrs. Fitzgerald was, as he expressed it, "not quite up to poor Fitzgerald's form, don't you know." But this fact made not the smallest difference to his friendship for her. He was not at all in the habit of appraising his acquaintances. The society life that he led had induced in him an easy toleration in which all his friends figured as "good sort of people." He went in and out of the house in Bryanston Street just as he liked. He escorted Mrs. Fitzgerald anywhere and everywhere; and though there had, of course, been a time when people talked of a possible future, the talk had died away and he had settled down in the eyes of the world, as in his own, as "just a friend."

He had accepted quite calmly Fergus Kennaway's appearance when that individual appeared as a rival to his position in the household. Kennaway was "all right," Sir Roderick said to himself; everybody knew him, and he went everywhere; he was, in fact, a rather prominent member of Sir Roderick's own set. The few bits of information he had ever gained as to Fergus Kennaway's private life were not of a kind that redounded exclusively to his credit. But the standard of morality in Sir Roderick's set was neither high nor exacting. So long as a man dressed well, knew the right people, and was amusing and agreeable, nothing more was required of him; and Fergus Kennaway fulfilled all these conditions.

But it was of Fergus Kennaway that he was thinking as he strolled slowly across the Park on the day after Mrs. Fitzgerald's dinner party, and his face was clouded with a certain undefined distaste. He was going to tea with some people he knew on the other side of the Park, but he was walking slowly and even saunteringly. In the middle of one of the paths he stopped short, and dug the end of his stick abruptly into the gravel.

"I can't make it out," he said to himself half aloud. "I don't exactly see why it

was caddish of him, but it was—that's all I know about it. And yet I don't know—it's absurd if one can't talk about a pretty servant-girl with a pair of fine eyes! And that's all he did, when all's said and done."

He took his stick out of the hole he had made in the gravel, traced a circle slowly and thoughtfully round the hole, and then sauntered on. He was a trifle perplexed with himself. He had never before disliked Fergus Kennaway or taken the slightest exception to any one of his proceedings. But the way in which he had spoken of Richenda Leicester had jarred upon him; jarred very unaccountably, as he thought. And Sir Roderick had thought of it a good deal during the time that had elapsed since the preceding evening. He was half inclined to despise Fergus Kennaway for it; and yet what right had he, what right had any one, to resent that sort of thing?

"It's absurd!" said Sir Roderick to himself. "And yet she somehow makes you feel as if she were quite another sort of girl."

He had just lifted his head after the last words, when he became aware of a little group of children going along the path in front of him. Next, he became aware that it was a very familiar group, and the next moment, he hardly knew why, he had quickened his pace and overtaken it. It consisted of Mrs. Fitzgerald's three children and their new nurse. The path they were taking bordered the Serpentine, and Brian was trudging along behind with a wet boat under his arm and a decidedly gloomy expression on his small countenance. He had just been snatched from the delights of sailing his boat.

Veronica's joyful and rather noisy greeting confused Sir Roderick's intentions, whatever they had been, as to speaking or not speaking to her nurse. He had barely satisfied the child's eagerness when something constrained him to raise his hat.

"How do you do?" he said, a little formally, to Richenda.

Richenda was not wheeling the mail-cart to-day. She held little Dolly by the hand, and only looked up from the child as he spoke. Her voice was quite as formal as his.

"How do you do?" she returned.

While he spoke to her Sir Roderick was looking into Richenda's face. He had an odd wish to satisfy himself as to whether this girl were or were not "the sort of girl" whom,

according to Sir Roderick's code of manners, Fergus Kennaway had a right to criticise freely. He did not stare openly at her, however; his glances were covert and unobtrusive; yet all the same he felt decidedly rebuked when Richenda, meeting his eyes as she spoke, met them with a steady dignity that made him feel, as he said to himself, "awfully small."

For diversion he turned to Veronica.

"Well, what do you think of your goings on last night?" he said. "I've spent the whole morning thinking what would be the best punishment for you. I'm the proper person to decide that, you know!"

"Oh, but, godfather"—the childish tone was very horror-struck—"a person can't help walking in its sleep!"

"A person that is properly brought up," he returned, "doesn't walk in the drawing-room in its nightgown when it ought to be in bed! You wait a few minutes and I'll consider the subject."

But his last words fell on the air. Veronica, not at all sure whether he was in jest or earnest, thought it wiser, at any rate, to discontinue the conversation. She had slipped behind, unobserved, to walk with Brian; and Sir Roderick found himself, to all intents and purposes, alone with Richenda. He ought—he knew it at the time, and he knew it afterwards—to have forthwith taken formal leave of her and gone his way. But he did not.

"Were you—I hope you didn't catch it awfully last night?" he began.

Richenda lifted to him a pair of surprised, clear eyes.

"I don't understand you!" she said coldly.

"I mean—I hope that wretch of a child didn't get you into an awful scrape—that little goose Veronica!"

"Oh!"

Richenda's interjection was decidedly frigid. In another moment her words and her manner would have ended all conversation between them for good. She meant them to do so; but then, somehow, she did not quite know how, her eyes were suddenly full of tears, and it was all she could do to keep them from falling. She had met his eyes, and the sympathetic concern she saw there was a touch on her sore heart that suddenly annihilated that sense of their respective positions by which she had been possessed.

"Oh, it was all my fault!" she faltered. "Mrs. Fitzgerald was very angry with me,

and I deserved it, no doubt. Still, I didn't know she walked in her sleep."

The young man bit his slight moustache savagely.

"Idiotic little beggar!" he said.

The force with which the words were uttered certainly did not apply to poor Veronica.

"You see," she went on rather plaintively, "if I had only known I could have looked out for her! Indeed, I'm sure I will next time."

Richenda was smarting a little under the injustice of having been blamed for what was not her fault. Mrs. Fitzgerald's rebuke had been, like all her chidings to any one and every one, a short outburst of indiscriminating anger because she herself had been personally inconvenienced. No idea of justice or reason had tempered it. And, also, it had been couched in language of a kind which had never before been addressed to Richenda, but with which all Mrs. Fitzgerald's servants were well acquainted. The unspoken, almost unconscious, deference and consideration of Sir Roderick's manner was as grateful to the unacknowledged sense of degradation which rankled sorely in poor Richenda's heart, as was his oddly expressed sympathy to the wounded feelings to which she owned.

"Oh, but there won't be a next time!" he responded cheerily. "You'll see! I'm sure she doesn't do it often, and I expect she got excited about your coming, and——"

"Nurse! Godfather!"

The words came in two little sharp shrieks, and Richenda and Sir Roderick turned with a simultaneous start.

About fifty yards behind them Veronica was dancing and waving her small hands in an agony of excited terror. At the foot of the shelving bank that went down to the edge of the Serpentine, Brian's small form was just slipping from the edge into the water, while his small hands clutched wildly at the tufts of grass on the edge. Richenda turned white as ashes, and clutched Dolly's hand tightly. She stood as if paralysed. Sir Roderick set off at a sharp run, flinging his coat off as he went. In another moment he had pushed gently aside the sobbing Veronica and made his way to the edge. One of Brian's small hands was still maintaining a desperate clutch, though it was slipping fast. The little fingers were just unloosening when Sir Roderick, giving his left hand to a bystander to hold for support, reached over,

and with his right caught the drenched little scrap of humanity by the collar and landed Brian, dripping like a little half-drowned terrier, safely on the bank.

He only paused one moment to recover breath.

"Look here," he said briefly to Richenda, as he came up the path with Brian in his arms to where she stood trembling and waiting with Dolly and Veronica, "I'm going to take this imp home in a cab. You come after with the children. I'll settle it all right for you! Give me my coat, some one."

And before Richenda could speak, Sir Roderick had set off at full speed with Brian in his arms to the nearest cab-stand.

CHAPTER VI.

THE weather, which had been so hot, changed suddenly to the coldest and most east-windy days known to an English June. In Mrs. Fitzgerald's nursery, partly on account of this, and partly on account of Brian, who had had a slight cold ever since his ducking in the Serpentine, a tiny fire had been burning throughout the afternoon; and it was only now slowly dying away. It was eight o'clock; the children were all in bed, and Richenda was alone in the nursery.

It was a large, long room on the top floor, furnished both prettily and sensibly with a good carpet, a table in one of its three windows, a cupboard, and a few chairs that left plenty of room for an enormous rocking-horse, and many another of the children's cherished toys. It was in the front of the house, and the windows faced the street. Richenda was sitting at the table. In front of her lay her small, black leather writing-case and some writing-paper; but the writing-case was unopened, and the writing-paper untouched. Richenda's elbows were on the table, and with her small face supported on the palms of her two hands she was gazing steadily and fixedly out of the window. It was a long window, and its sill was below the level of the table, giving her an uninterrupted view of the prospect out of doors.

The prospect in question was by no means interesting or alluring. There is no phase of daylight more dreary and more depressing than the hard grey light of a long sunless summer's evening. The outlines of the opposite houses seemed to stand out sharp and hard in its clearness; and the street, the pavement, and the sky were

all the same dull grey. Through a gap between two houses a few trees belonging to a back garden were visible. And somehow the glimpses thus obtained of their long arms, clothed with delicate fresh green, being swayed and pitilessly torn in the biting wind, seemed the culminating point of the whole dreary aspect. Richenda had examined it all with weary, dispirited eyes when she first settled herself down at the table; but now her steady gaze took in none of the scene or its details.

It was a Wednesday, and she had been exactly a fortnight in her "place," as she called it to herself bitterly. And the difficulties and trials of that "place" and her position in it were cutting deeper than her brave heart had ever dreamed.

Richenda Leicester was very sweet-tempered; that is to say, her temper was always under good control. She had immense conscientiousness, and a reserve fund of untiring patience. She had also a strong will, and a great deal of the quality without which no character can develop itself—a steady self-respect. Though she did not think about it, or analyse her feelings, she had felt vaguely that she was quite well equipped for the battle of life, and quite competent to take her future in her hands and shape it to her own wishes. On that long past evening at home when the brothers and sister had talked together over the fire, she had thought with a heart that beat high and hopefully that only her training was necessary to enable her to carve out for herself a career which, if humble, should be at least distinguished on its own lines. And though she had come anxiously and tremblingly to her work at first, the background of her hope and confidence had never moved.

Perhaps the first of poor Richenda's hopes had received its death-blow at the sight of Mrs. Fitzgerald. She had hoped that she might have a woman as mistress who would treat her as a friend, and as, what Richenda knew herself to be, a lady. Of course, when she saw Mrs. Fitzgerald and felt the first touch of her manner, all these hopes were thrown down. She knew that she should have a mistress, in the sense that a servant has a mistress, and no other. Richenda was not the girl to give up Mrs. Fitzgerald's situation for one disappointment; she had entered on her work bravely enough, thinking that, after all, the kind of woman she had to serve mattered but little if she did but serve her faithfully. Still, the disappoint-

ment was there, and it had been a sore one.

It was in this very matter of faithful service that poor Richenda's second disappointment had visited her. All through the first and second day she had thought that things were going so smoothly, that she was doing her work carefully, and leaving no detail undone. Then on the second evening had come Veronica's unfortunate sleep-walking to bring Richenda the crushing blow of Mrs. Fitzgerald's anger. She had scarcely recovered from that when her second rebuke awaited her. This had hurt the girl's feelings in many ways far more than the first.

Sir Roderick Graeme had kept his word, and had made the most ample explanation of the circumstances which led to Brian's accident. But, not unnaturally, the fact that Sir Roderick was concerned in the explanation at all had only made Mrs. Fitzgerald more angry with Richenda. It was not exactly the fact of his meeting them in itself; he had met and talked to the children hundreds of times before, Mrs. Fitzgerald had cried, exaggeratedly, but he had never, she said, received from any one of her nurses what she called "such encouragement to talk." But on this the girl had faced her mistress with such angrily burning cheeks and such proudly shining eyes, that Mrs. Fitzgerald, half alarmed, had brought her scolding to a close with a little sarcastic, biting taunt which had hurt Richenda more than all that had gone before. And since that day, though she had interchanged no words with Sir Roderick Graeme, Mrs. Fitzgerald never let her forget that first taunt. Innuendoes, half uttered sentences, mocking little smiles were the weapons Mrs. Fitzgerald used, apparently without any idea of the loss her personal dignity sustained in so doing.

Richenda quivered under them one and all. She could not resent them, they were too careless in manner for that; so she bore them with the bravest front she could show, and only smarted inwardly. She was thinking, as she sat looking out of the window, of the life of the past fortnight, and all it had brought and taught her. She was thinking over Mrs. Fitzgerald's light gibes about Sir Roderick, and she was thinking how little foundation there was for them. She was also thinking of another train of circumstances against which none of Mrs. Fitzgerald's sneers would have seemed to Richenda too pointed or too biting. But Mrs. Fitzgerald, devoting all

her perceptions to what did not exist, saw nothing whatever of what did. Mr. Fergus Kennaway was in Richenda's life a far keener source of distress than her employer's taunting words. She had by no means forgotten his first insulting stare when he managed to contrive an opportunity for a second. Only two days later Richenda and the children had been crossing over from the Park to their own side of the way, when a block in the traffic had brought them to an island. In the block, in a handsome, just on a level with the island, was Mr. Fergus Kennaway. He had promptly got out, paid the driver, and planted himself on the island with Richenda and the children. Richenda had seen his proceedings and understood exactly what they meant; but to escape from him was impossible, to ignore his presence was impossible, and Richenda had had to stand patiently, exposed to a second long and insolent stare, while he extracted from Veronica every detail respecting their usual walks and likely places of resort during the next few days. He had not spoken to her on that occasion, it was true; but on the next time no such restraint curbed his speech. This next meeting came about in the South Kensington Museum. Richenda had taken the children there as the most secluded of all the places detailed with such misplaced fluency by Veronica, when he appeared for the third time. He had greeted Richenda familiarly; he had entered into a conversation which the most immoveable silence on her part could not end; and he had finally—Richenda's cheeks burned whenever she thought of it—told her that she was the prettiest girl he knew.

Since then he had called with unmistakable persistency at times when he knew he should meet the children either going in or coming out. Altogether he had not left Richenda a day's peace of mind since his first sight of her.

She was wondering now, as she had several times wondered before, whether she should tell Mrs. Fitzgerald of Mr. Kennaway's undisguised pursuit of her. She could not make up her mind what to do. She would have told her mistress, and appealed to her for her help, if it had not been for the mocking sneers that had been lavished on her in connection with another man. She shrank from exposing herself to a whole new series of attacks, and she hoped against hope that some chance—the children's talk, for instance—might make Mr. Kennaway's proceedings known. She

fell back on this conclusion again now, after a long and weary consideration of a meeting with him that had taken place that very afternoon; and then Richenda's chin went down suddenly deeper into the hollows of her two hands, and her thoughts seemed to become deeper too.

They had wandered from Fergus Kenna-way to the other man whom chance had thrown into her life during the past fortnight. She was thinking just a little bitterly of the contrast of the behaviour of the two during the last two weeks. She had seen Sir Roderick Graeme a great many times since the day of Brian's accident; but beyond the barest polite recognition, he had taken no notice of her. He had even been up to have tea with Brian, when his cold was at its worst, and had devoted the whole of the hour he stayed to mechanical experiments with the boy, without so much as casting one glance in Richenda's direction as she sat sewing by the window. He had always been very polite, very courteous, Richenda owned to herself now, with a little upward curl of her lip; he had behaved exactly as he ought to behave—to a servant!

"He thinks I am a servant," she said to

herself, "and so he is perfectly polite to me. He is so nice, he always would be polite to a servant. And yet I thought—I thought that he understood. I thought—oh, what a horrid world it is!"

And then the unreasoning Richenda, who had just been so very angry with one man for paying her too much attention, was even angrier with the other because he did not pay her a little more.

"He did not even take the trouble to find out," she said scornfully. "He just takes everything for granted."

And then Richenda's eyes were fixed on the cold, wind-swept trees, but, instead of seeing them, she saw a simple, attractive, manly face; and she contrasted it with the other that she had grown to dislike so much. It grew clearer and clearer before her eyes, and she turned with a quick start when the nursery door opened with an impatient click, and Amelia, the smart parlourmaid, set down Richenda's supper-tray on the table with a jerk.

"Kate's out, it seems," she said, "and so I've got to bring your supper up. Here it is, if you can leave off dreaming of your sweethearts to look at it!"

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PRISONERS OF SILENCE.

By MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

Author of "A Valiant Ignorance," "A Mere Cypher,"
"Cross Currents," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"HAVE you seen him?"

"For a moment only. He told me he would rather be alone."

The question and answer, low-toned and brief, passed on the pavement outside the house in which North Branston lived. The questioner, Archdeacon French, had come up to the steps just as the young doctor who had been North's best man came out at the door, and had accosted him with that singular directness which only a common concern creates. It was seven o'clock in the evening; the evening of the tenth of September; the evening, as it seemed to these two men, of one of the longest days they had ever known. Five hours had passed since the wedding party had broken up; and even after five hours no very clear conception as to the sequence of events, as they had followed immediately upon Mrs. Vallotson's loss of consciousness, was possible to those upon whom had fallen the task of quelling the excitement and confusion that had ensued. That Lady Karslake had left the church at once; had left it on a brief word from North Branston as he held her hands for one instant in his own, was all of which Archdeacon French himself was certain, until the moment when a deep quiet had fallen upon the empty church, and he stood at the door of the vestry where the still unconscious woman lay.

Mrs. Vallotson had been taken to her hotel, attended by the young doctor whose services to North on that day should have

been of so different a nature. Archdeacon French and North had waited there, in a silence which the former could not break, until word was brought them that consciousness had returned. And then North, putting aside the words the other tried to speak with a stiff movement of his hand, and something in his eyes that seemed to plead for toleration, left the house alone, without a word.

A pause followed the answer to Archdeacon French's question; a pause, eloquent on the part of both men, of strongly moved feeling. Then the Archdeacon said, "How is Mrs. Vallotson?"

The young doctor's tone and manner were rather constrained as he answered.

"Such an attack as hers," he said, "would have prostrated most women. But Mrs. Vallotson is a lady of extraordinary force. She is practically recovered."

"Have you just come from her?"

The younger man bent his head.

"Yes," he said in a low voice. "There is no necessity for my seeing her again, and I thought that Branston would wish to know."

"Did she send him any word?" asked Archdeacon French in the same low tone.

"No!" The young man hesitated for a moment, and then added hurriedly, "but he knows that she is well enough to see him."

There was another eloquent pause, and this time the silence was broken by the younger man.

"Are you going up, sir?" he asked.

Archdeacon French brought back his troubled, kindly gaze from the far distance on which it was fixed, and looked at his companion.

"No," he said quietly, "not now, he is best alone until it is over."

As if by common consent, and without

another word, the two men turned and walked slowly away down the street.

Half an hour passed, the evening shadows were beginning to fall, and a soft breeze had sprung up. The street, a quiet one at all times, was quite empty when the door of the house opened and North Branston came out. The face was absolutely without colour, and it was very quiet; quiet with that terrible quiescence which tells of tension which has passed beyond the relief of any outward manifestation. His deep-set eyes had sunk a little in his head, but they were steady and almost dull. He walked down the street with a regular mechanical stride, and turned into the road leading to the hotel in which Mrs. Vallotson was stopping.

It was about a quarter of an hour's walk. His pace never varied, neither did his expression alter in the least. Having arrived, he sent up his name to Mrs. Vallotson's private sitting-room, waited quietly until his messenger returned, and then followed him upstairs.

It was the ordinary hotel sitting-room, a little shabbier and more uninteresting than usual perhaps, and rather untidy, partly, as it seemed, by reason of rough and continual pacing to and fro, which had displaced the furniture, and partly by reason of certain traces of Mrs. Vallotson's indisposition—a medicine bottle and wineglass on the table, a shawl flung down on a chair, a heap of tumbled pillows, and so forth. It was furnished with a round table, a sideboard and a chiffonier, a suite of chairs, and a sofa. The sofa was so placed against the wall that it faced the door. And on the sofa, directly confronting North as he entered, supporting herself heavily with one hand on the seat, as though she had sat down suddenly and involuntarily, was Mrs. Vallotson.

The waiter who had announced North withdrew, shutting the door noiselessly behind him. For a long moment not the slightest sound broke the dead silence of the room.

But that Mrs. Vallotson's stillness was temporary and abnormal, the result of some momentary and inexplicable fascination, was obvious in every line of her figure. The change that had come upon her in the course of the past few hours was extraordinary, first of all by reason of the impassable gulf which it fixed between the immovable, impassive woman of the past few weeks, the strongly controlled woman of all the years that were gone, and the

woman of the present. It was as though in the interval of unconsciousness all the barriers of her nature—barriers alike instinctive and deliberate—which had held down and held back the real bent of the woman, had been obliterated once and for all, leaving free and unrestrained all the violent and unrefined passion that lay behind. Her face seemed to have grown coarser; the strong set of the mouth, relaxed and weakened, no longer held in abeyance those subtle suggestions of something blunt and unrefined within. Her whole expression was one of rage and hatred, half sullen half reckless, alike impotent and defiant. Her hair, put up, as it seemed, by hands that trembled, was loose and disordered. Her dress, unfastened at the throat as though the swelling muscles would bear no pressure, had a dishevelled air. Her whole appearance as she sat there, staring at North with hot, bloodshot eyes, was inexpressibly wild and terrible.

It was Mrs. Vallotson who broke the silence. She seemed to wrench her hold from the sofa as she rose, with aimless violence, to her feet.

"You've come!" she said hoarsely. "I wondered how soon!"

North Branston had not moved. As he met the passion of vindictive hatred in her face his own had grown a little stiller; but that was all. Of the bitterness and the antagonism, which the presence of the woman before him had never hitherto failed to create in him, his expression held now not a trace. It was as though these feelings, touching the extreme point of their development, had merged into something greater and higher than themselves, something before the tragedy of which all else faded and disappeared. The chain was drawing tighter and tighter, even to the last link, and the same supreme agony of that inexorable pressure that had laid bare the coarsest and most rebellious depths of the woman's spirit had brought to the man the strength of a great calm.

"Yes," he said in a low, steady tone, "I have come."

"What a fool!" she muttered. "What a fool! What a fool I've been! After all these days, after all these weeks, to lose my head! To fail at the very last! Oh, what a fool!"

The words were not addressed to North. She seemed for the moment almost to have forgotten his presence. And there was something so horrible about the intensity of the self-vituperation, thus oblivious of

everything but itself, that it was little wonder that the man who heard her took two steps forward as he spoke, as though with a blind instinct towards breaking up the situation:

"Do not let us protract this!" he said. "You know what I am here for. You know to what I have a right. Give it me!"

She turned upon him with an inarticulate ejaculation, clutching involuntarily at the back of a chair, her breath coming thick and fast as though it would choke her.

"Your right!" she cried. "Yes, you must have your right at last. Your right! What is it, do you think? A lifelong curse; a lifelong shame! A curse which, if I had my will, should kill you where you stand! A shame which I have held off all these years, only that you may drag it down on me at last. You've been the bane of my existence from the first! I might have known that this would come through you!"

Motionless as a rock North stood confronting her; the muscles of his face had contracted slightly. As though holding to that one rope in the midst of a sea of hideous confusion, he repeated his words:

"Give me what I am here for."

She hardly seemed to hear his words. As though he had not spoken she went on, her voice growing in coarse fury with every syllable.

"If I could go back again!" she cried. She was beating her hand wildly against the bar of the chair. "If I could go back! The guilt would have been yours, not mine. I did my part when I forbade the marriage. On you—you who defied me, who trampled under your feet the claims of gratitude and duty, on you Heaven's vengeance would have fallen, not on me! Why did I interfere? Why did I interfere?"

"It's done!" he said hoarsely. "The truth must follow. Tell it me!"

She faced him for one moment; her eyes glaring, her features working convulsively. Then she broke into a wild laugh.

"Take it, then!" she cried, "if you're so anxious for it. Here it is. The woman you were going to make your wife is the widow of your father!"

"What?"

The cry broke from North Branston, as a man may cry once stabbed through and through. Then there was a silence. Slowly and gropingly, with a face which was rapidly changing from white to grey, he stretched out his hand and felt for a chair. He sat down heavily, leaning forward, one clenched hand pressed down on the table.

"Say that again!" The words came from North Branston thick, hardly audible, and with long intervals between each. He did not lift his head.

As though in launching at him the bolt which had stunned him, her fury, thus relieved, had sunk down, leaving her to a ghastly realisation of the irretrievableness of the situation, the woman on the other side of the table was watching him, with the defiant challenge in her distorted face giving place to a furtive, sullen stare.

Supporting herself by the grip with which she clutched the chair-rail in her hand, Mrs. Vallotson answered hoarsely:

"Sir William Karslake was your father. You were an illegitimate child."

With a sudden desperate ejaculation, as though the point pressed home had quickened where it should have killed, North Branston threw up his head, and brought his clenched fist down on the table. His face was ashen and drawn, but every line of it was instinct with that which was flashing in his eyes—absolute negation and denial.

"It's false!" he cried. "It's false! Sir William Karslake had spent his life in India. It is not possible. How could a man live to my age in ignorance of such a curse upon his life? How——"

The words froze on his lips; the passion of expression turned to stone upon his face. Looking into the eyes of the woman before him, he looked back down the years of his life, and he saw there, rolling up from the farthest limits of his memory, a shapeless shadow which would not be denied; which seemed to take upon itself, even as he looked, the outline of a ghastly form which it had never worn before.

"Sir William Karslake went to India the year after you were born."

The words were uttered in a voice like that of an automaton, and the speaker's dreadful eyes never shifted from his face. With a last wild effort to release himself, with a final instinct to fight down that shadow, to beat it off, to crush it into nothingness at any cost, North Branston sprang to his feet with a hoarse cry.

"It's a lie!" he said. "Prove it! Give me your authority! Tell me how you know!"

The fierce demand, hurled out so desperately, rose and filled the room, and dropped upon a dead silence. A livid shade, not like the hue of life at all, was stealing over Mrs. Vallotson's face. She was leaning heavily forward on the chair by which she

held, her breath coming in great laboured gasps. She tried to speak, but only a faint rattling in her throat made itself audible.

"Can't you understand?"

The words reached his ears thick and indistinct, and, as he heard them, something in her eyes seemed to leap up and burn into his brain. Once more, slowly, and for the last time, the look painted on her face was reflected back upon the face of the man with whom she was confronted. The muscles on North Branston's forehead were standing out tense and strained. His features seemed to freeze gradually into a horror unimaginable, inconceivable. He fell back a pace, and stood there staring at her.

"Say it!"

Hardly audible as the two words were, they carried with them the force of a command. And slowly, as though the words were dragged from her by an agency against which she was powerless, Mrs. Vallotson answered them.

"Sir William Karslake's son is also mine."

The last links of the chain were drawn together. The man and woman bound by it stood face to face in an awful silence—mother and son.

Seconds passed into moments; moments drifted into the black gulf of the past; and not the slightest movement broke the death-like stillness of the room. The man was the first to stir. With one of those commonplace everyday actions which show that tension too highly strained has snapped, that the mind pushed too far has relapsed into dull inaction, North sat down and rested his forehead on his hand as his elbow propped itself upon the table. As though his movement had broken a spell, the dreadful rigidity of Mrs. Vallotson's figure broke up in the same instant. Beating her hands passionately together, she turned upon him where he sat, no colour coming back into her face, her eyes glaring out of it in what seemed to be a very delirium of long pent-up hatred and impotent rebellion.

"Why were you ever born?" she cried, in a hoarse, suppressed tone. "Why were you ever born? I hated you at first. You were the living sign, never to be done away with, of my intolerable folly! I've hated you month by month and year by year. You were the never-to-be-forgotten pledge of what was past and done with! I hate you now ten times and twenty times over. You've brought me to this!"

He lifted his head and looked at her. His face had a stricken look upon it. His voice seemed to come from very far away.

"Not I!" he said. "It is the hand of fate!"

"Fate!" she echoed. "Yes, it was fate that left me with you first, perhaps! I fought fate then, and won. I put my will against the past, and wiped it out. I said that not a trace of it should live, and not a trace of it has lived—except in you!"

She stopped, throwing out one arm as in supreme denunciation, with a gesture of which the tragedy struck with indescribable incongruity against the coarse violence of her appearance. It was the awful incongruity that lay behind; the unspeakable discrepancy between the indomitable power which had overborne all that stood in its path, and the sordid narrowness of the limitations in which it had worked; materialised, and given visible form.

A strand of her grey hair had become loose and fallen about her. She lifted her hand and thrust it roughly back.

"You'll have to know the details, I suppose," she said; and the recklessness of her defiance flashed in her eyes, and rang in every tone of her voice. "Then here they are. Nothing that you've ever heard about the past is true. I made a past, when I turned that page of my life of which you are the only trace, to fit the future that I meant to have. I was a solicitor's daughter in a little country town, and I went away with your father when I was seventeen. I knew what I was doing well enough, but I didn't care. He took me abroad, and he stayed with me constantly until you were born. Then he got tired of me. That was your fault!"

Her voice rose fiercely as she spoke the last words. North Branston neither moved nor spoke. His face, haggard and drawn, was still turned to her, but he hardly seemed to see her. His dull and sunken eyes seemed to be looking beyond, looking at that not visible to any physical vision—the long vista of the terrible past, lighted up now and for ever as with flashes of lurid fire. She paused an instant and then went on.

"I was tired of the life by that time, too!" she said. "I wanted to get back. He behaved very well to me. He had been amusing himself before he settled down in life, and he was willing to pay for his amusement. He made me an allowance, and we separated."

"Why did you not own me?"

"Own you!" she cried passionately. "I wish I had killed you! I hated you, I say! I would not have you call me mother; I would not treat you as my child.

There was a girl in the hotel where he left me with a step-sister who was only a baby. That put it into my head to call you my brother. Then I set to work to cover up all trace of what had been. I never drew the allowance; it would have been a link with the past, and I wanted him to lose sight of me. I came to England and worked. Before six months were over I read in a paper that he was gone to India. He belonged to one of the families whose doings are recorded in the papers, your father! Don't forget that!" She spoke with a wild, irrepressible sneer, passing her hand across her forehead, on which the drops stood thick, as she paused a moment. "Then I knew that I was safe," she went on. "I had no difficulty from the first. No one doubted me—I never gave them a chance. I got what I wanted. I became a married woman, respected and looked up to. I've had the position I intended to have, and no other woman could have filled it better than I have done! For eight-and-twenty years you were the only roughness in my life!"

Her voice—vibrating with a coarser triumph so strangely disproportionate to the achievement of which she spoke; echoing with a spirit which, in the moment of her defeat, lit up the life thus baldly sketched with the strange pathos which hovers round futility and inadequacy—trembled with an intensity of vindictiveness, and she stopped abruptly. But only for a moment. As though with that final statement of the satisfaction of her life there had rushed upon her anew the realisation of what she had lost, a very frenzy of blind, unreasoning rebellion surged up in her, and she broke into a sudden furious torrent of speech.

"Fate!" she said, "you call it fate! It comes through you, from first to last! It comes through you. If you had never lived it never could have happened! If you had never seen this woman it never could have happened! If you——"

"Stop!"

Stumblingly and painfully North Branson had risen to his feet. The monosyllable had burst from him low and broken, but with that ringing in it before which even the rage of the half-maddened woman before him paused instinctively.

"Stop!" he cried again. "If it has come through me, it comes upon me also! If my existence is a curse to you, what else is it to me? We are two puppets in the hands of a power beyond us, bound together to our own destruction!"

DWELLERS ON THE HEATH.

"As for the people in the cottages on the Heath, it's no manner of use asking them to come out for the day; they've all got their own cows and pigs to tend."

Such was the discouraging answer to my enquiry for a charwoman on arriving in a new country neighbourhood. Eventually, the charwoman was secured elsewhere, and I seized an early opportunity of investigating these cottagers who appeared to enjoy life under such ideal conditions. A further acquaintance with the dwellers on the Heath, has considerably modified my first impression of the accession of comfort necessarily derivable from the possession of a few acres of land by labourers. In the first place there can be no doubt that the squalor and insanitary condition of these tiny farms far exceeds that of ordinary cottages. The pigstyes and cowsheds are not unfrequently under the same roof with the dwelling-house, leaning either against the back or one of the side walls, and all draining with absolute impartiality into open gutters and stagnant pools round the door. The perpetual presence of fowls in the kitchen is in itself destructive of any pretence at cleanliness. Yet all the early spring chickens, by which a considerable profit is made, have of necessity to be reared indoors. Most of the winter one or two hens with their young families are to be found clucking about all the kitchens on the Heath, the floors being strewn with grain or messes of sopped bread likely to tempt the appetite of the tender young birds, who, when satisfied, all nestle down under their mother's wing in baskets or on heaps of sacking provided for them. During the summer months, when the house doors stand open from morning till night, the poultry wander in and out with an entire sense of possession, searching under the table and dresser for fallen scraps as unconcerned as though they were scratching on the rubbish-heap outside. It is amusing to notice how on the arrival of a visitor the mistress of the house deems it due to the conventionalities to make a polite attempt at clearing the kitchen of poultry. After providing one with a chair hospitably near the fire, she summons the children to help her drive them out. Then ensues an indescribable scene of cackling, dust, and flying of feathers. Two or three children pursuing half-a-dozen excitable cockerels under churns and behind mangles, create an

amount of confusion which effectually stops conversation for some time ; and in the end the poultry always come off victorious. Directly the active pursuit ceases they are all back again in the kitchen, and both hostess and visitor are reduced to feigning not to notice their presence as the only chance of a quiet life.

Of course, the possession of pigs necessitates the presence of large sacks of meal and other food for fattening them, which, in order to ensure safety from the rats, have usually to be kept in the living rooms, sadly encumbering the small available space, and giving an air of discomfort which it is difficult to exaggerate. The rats also have a way of following what they appear to regard as their natural perquisites, and even in broad daylight one sometimes sees a dark shadow gliding towards the winter board of food.

The dozen detached cottages on the Heath form a small hamlet on the extreme confines of a country parish. They are completely off the main road, and approachable only by a rough grass lane, which in winter is practically impassable from mud. Mud, indeed, is the keynote of the situation, for the Heath is nothing but a quagmire of clay, traversed by huge ditches full of stagnant water. Until the last few years it was all practically waste land, upon which in by-gone times squatters had run up little irregular buildings, paying a merely nominal rent to the lord of the manor for the land enclosed. The rule in such cases used to be that anybody who could build his dwelling in a night should have undisturbed possession of it ; and old people tell one how in their childhood the neighbours used to join together and help each other to run up in a few hours something that might be called a house. A single room roofed in was sufficient to establish a right, and the house could afterwards be completed and enlarged at its owner's leisure. Under these circumstances the situation and appearance of the Heath cottages are, as might be supposed, varied in the extreme. Very little attempt has been made to secure any convenience of approach. The walls of some of them rise out of the pool of stagnant water that borders the lane all the year round ; quite as many are dotted about in the corners of the rush-grown fields, two or three of which form each little farm. During the winter, neighbours living some quarter of a mile apart frequently see nothing of each other for weeks, the mud dividing them almost as

completely as a channel of water. At first I could not imagine how the dwellers on the Heath could get away from their houses at all during the wet season, much less how they ever contrived to send their children daily to school ; but gradually, in pity for my wanderings in knee-deep mud up the grassy lane, they revealed to me a line of field-paths which were in general use by the inhabitants, and which, in spite of the approach to all the stiles being through water, were certainly a great improvement on the road. Only absolute strangers attempted to use the latter in wet weather.

As may be supposed, such surroundings did not encourage much neatness of appearance amongst the women, and the knowledge that no visitors might be expected from one year's end to another removed all sense of restraint. It was a sort of shock at first to find the proprietress of three or four cows and a pony-cart, clad in a ragged old short skirt of nondescript colour and a scanty shawl that no respectable villager would have worn. But this rough appearance is explained by the fact that the women practically do the work of the place. If the husbands are able-bodied, they wisely elect to supplement the profits of their little farms by regular wages as labourers elsewhere. This means that the wife—aided, perhaps, by the children after school hours—has to attend to the cows, pigs, and poultry ; no light task when there are two or three calves to rear, butter to be churned and taken to market once a week, with whatever poultry may be ready for sale, and a large garden to be worked and kept in order. Some of these farms on the Heath are tenanted by invalid men whose wives do all the work, with what little help their husbands can give when able to crawl from the fireside ; but I do not think if the reverse were the case they could manage. When the woman falls ill they have to sell the cow, and then all is at an end. The bare possibility of the man milking, churning, and making up the butter, never seems to occur to them. Their personal attachment to a good cow is very great. One sick woman who was compelled to part with hers through inability to attend to the butter-making, could not speak of it without tears ; and the man could not bring himself to drive it to market, but had to send a friend. As the reason for giving up farming on a small scale seems almost always to be ill health on the part of the woman, the obvious conclusion

to be drawn is that as long as the wife is exceptionally strong, and willing to work out of doors as hard as any man, in addition to doing the washing and such domestic duties as are strictly indispensable, just so long are these little farms profitable. Indisputably it must be an advantage for the children to obtain fresh milk easily; but in other respects the standard of comfort amongst these little proprietors seems distinctly below that of ordinary cottagers.

It was from a woman on the Heath that I heard the following wonderful cure for jaundice, or yellow-wort as they call it. In answer to my enquiries respecting her son, who had been ailing for some time, she replied that he had at last completely recovered, adding:

"'Twasn't the doctor, though, as did it; they say as doctors ain't no manner of good for that complaint, can't do nothing with it like!"

I expressed my natural curiosity as to how, under these circumstances, the cure had been effected.

"Well, I took him to the doctor, and then I took him along to the woman," she said. "But 'twas the woman cured him."

It is not the first time that I have had occasion to notice this impartial conduct on the part of my neighbours. In cases of illness, for the sake of respectability, as one might say, they have recourse to the regular practitioner, whilst at the same time they give themselves a second chance by reciting a charm, or trying some concoction of herbs recommended by an acquaintance. If they recover, the credit is given as a matter of course to the amateur medical adviser.

It required some pressing to elicit from my hostess a detailed account of the ceremony to which this obstinate case of jaundice had at last yielded. Nowadays cottagers are very reticent about these little irregular cures, speaking of them shyly, and with an evident dread of exciting either ridicule or blame.

"Well, then," she said at last, "this is how it was. The woman broke off a hank of white yarn, and she measured it from her elbow to the tip of her middle finger several times, and she said something, but I couldn't rightly hear the words. Then she measured it again up and down her arm the same way until the yarn was all gone, and then she said some more words and the boy's name.

"'The illness is in him the depth of my finger,' she told me. But what she meant by that I can't say. And then he was to

go home and get a pennyworth of saffron, and put it in a bottle of brandy, and drink some every day. We don't know what the words were, but we think it was something out of the Bible. They must never tell what words they say, or the power would go."

It appears on investigation that there are two or three of these women still about in the neighbourhood, quite respectable people from all account.

"Yes, one of them cured father years ago when he was mortal bad with the yellow-wort," continued my hostess, at last wound up to giving her experiences on the subject. "He used to breathe on a rough hank of yarn, a nog as we call it, and then send it to the woman at her house. And she'd make a sort of rope from it and send it back to him to wear round his body; he wore it for weeks, and my son he wore one round his leg. When the woman sees any one she can say whether the illness has gone too far for her or not. Each time my son went to see her she'd say how he was, and of course he'd know from his own feelings how he felt, and they always seemed to agree together. But you mustn't pay the woman, or she loses the power. People give her presents after, but it mustn't be money. Why, I've often worn a charm round my neck for the toothache. Bible words, that is, sewn up in a little bag."

At this point I naturally interrupted the narrative to enquire whether the charm had ever cured her.

"Well, there!" she replied, with a smile, "I never could rest without looking at the words, and of course that broke the charm. And you mustn't let it fall neither, or that spoils it. All the words the women use are out of the Bible," she reiterated, feeling that this information must necessarily be of a reassuring nature, and neutralise any bad impression I might have formed of her as one dealing in forbidden arts.

A prominent trait in cottagers is the reckless courage with which they will try any fresh remedy that is suggested in the most casual manner. A girl on the Heath who was constantly being treated for eczema at the hospital attributed a sudden cessation of the complaint—which had proved too obstinate for the doctors—to taking a bottle of mixture decocted from various herbs, which had been recommended to her mother by a woman she saw one market day. In this instance, however, the cure was very temporary. Another woman recently told

me that her health had been greatly benefited by trying a box of pills she was told of by a stranger she met in the train. The men are quite as enterprising. Two in particular I remember, who, having fallen into chronic ill health, used to make a practice of searching down the advertisement sheet of the local newspaper, and trying in turn all the remedies that seemed likely to bear upon their cases.

Perhaps the dwellers on the Heath may be excused for trying any quack medicine or superstitious charm which promises to counteract the disease bred of universal damp. As a matter of fact, these dozen families have for the most part quite as sickly an aspect as the inhabitants of any back street in a manufacturing town. This is not a district of dramatic floods, sweeping all before them; but of monotonous ankle-deep mud for fully eight months of the year.

"Seems to me her face looks all the same colour as the mud!" said an old man to me once, when touching on his neighbour's appearance with more realistic truth than gallantry, seeing that she was of the opposite sex. His definition, however, of the prevailing complexion of the dwellers on the Heath was absolutely correct. Some of their complaints have been medically attributed to the amount of badly cured and half-cooked bacon eaten by the country people, which is said to produce disastrous effects on the digestion.

It may well be imagined with how little favour the dwellers on the Heath regard the modern system of compulsory education. On these tiny farms, where the man of the house if not ailing is usually absent, a strong boy of twelve to do jobs about the place is simply an invaluable assistant to the hard-worked woman. Yet these strong boys with a taste for outdoor work are precisely the ones who have the greatest difficulty in passing the required standard, and consequently have to be kept drudging on at school long after their clever companions, who might obviously profit by a little extra book-learning, are free to earn wages as farm servants. The last year of the backward boy's attendance at school is often embittered by a kind of guerilla warfare between his parents and the school authorities, each struggling for possession of his unfortunate person. Happily, when the occasion arises, even the backward boy can bestir himself and conquer sufficient learning for all practical purposes. Not long since an old woman was telling me how her son, in the days when such a feat was possible,

had managed to attend the village school for years without ever attaining to the art of writing. Grown older, and becoming unsettled, he took it into his head to emigrate to America, and obtained papers and directions on the subject from the rector. The despair of his parents was intense when they discovered his project, not so much at the prospect of parting from him, as at the idea that henceforth all communication between them would be at an end on account of his inability to write, or even to read written characters. They naturally shrank from the idea of having to employ a third person as go-between; their dislike to this apparently inevitable arrangement being intensified by poor people's prevailing dread that strangers will become acquainted with their affairs—a dread not in the least neutralised by the reflection that an inhabitant of New York was not likely to be deeply interested in scraps of family news from an English village. However, the solution of the problem came from the young man himself, who during his last few weeks at home turned his attention to study, sitting about under hedges, as his mother proudly recalls, poring over his books. The parents' dread was averted; letters arrived regularly from America, at first painfully written in a childish, unformed hand, but as the years passed by gaining in length and facility, and bringing with them the news of a prosperous career crowned by the possession of a flourishing American wife, whose photograph, with that of a baby in a most gorgeous transatlantic robe, form treasured ornaments of the old people's cottage.

There is one epoch from which all events on the Heath date, namely, the sale of the land some years ago by the lord of the manor, and its partition amongst several small landlords. There are recollections of fancied injustice in connection with that transfer, which still rankle with a freshness that the lapse of time seems incapable of dimming. These memories may probably be tinged with prejudice, but the fact certainly remains that the Heath is rapidly depopulating since its partition. The first act of those who by saving or borrowing had collected a sufficient sum to purchase two or three cottages, was to raise the rents to such a prohibitive height that their neighbours rebelled, and several of the old inhabitants left the Heath sooner than be imposed upon. The shortsightedness of this policy soon became visible, for the tumbledown old places which had only been kept going by constant patching with a few

boards, or a handful of thatch, became rapidly uninhabitable on being left empty. Many of them are half-ruined, some are converted into cattle-sheds, of others nothing remains but a heap of stones overgrown with long grass and sting-nettles. A few of these ruins date from still earlier times, for several of the first dwellers on the Heath, who had gradually taken up a considerable amount of land round their little dwellings, did not care to retain it when the lord of the manor required some acknowledgement in the shape of rent; but it was undoubtedly the partition of the land which gave the last blow to the prosperity of the settlement.

The grinding discomforts experienced by the tenants under these landlords, drawn from the same class as themselves, is well illustrated by what a woman on the Heath recently told me. She and her husband had newly come to one of these little places, and had stipulated before entering that the pump should be cleaned out, as it was so foul as to be unuseable. This, however, was not done, and the next time the landlord came round to collect his rents the woman reproached him with putting her to the trouble of fetching water from a distant well for butter-making, drinking, and such purposes. After expressing his surprise that she was not satisfied with the sooty water that ran off the roof, which he stated was always considered good enough for these purposes in his own house, he fell into a passion, and with most unnecessarily vehement language wound up by declaring:

"All the trouble comes of you faddy old women running here and there after clean water, listening to all the stuff these doctors and inspectors tell you! Why, scores of times I've lain down and drunk out of the ruts in the road and no harm come to me!"

"But for all he said I can't conceit the dirty water, not if it were ever so!" concluded my informant, who, however, did not succeed in getting her pump mended.

In spite of the universal dampness of the Heath the people have to go a long way to get their clean water, and one of their chief troubles in wet weather is that the flooded meadows cut them off from the best well. They think a great deal of this good drinking water, and I have heard of an old woman, years after she had left the place, craving so incessantly on her death-bed for a drink of water out of a well on the Heath that her friends actually satisfied her by sending for some.

The accuracy and intensity with which

cottagers retain impressions is doubtless the result of the monotonous lives they lead, in which the smallest departure from the daily routine is commented on and discussed in all its aspects.

This applies more especially to the elderly people, whose memory for detail is simply marvellous; after the lapse of half a lifetime, they can quote glibly the amount they paid the doctor for attendance during any special illness. But the conditions under which many of them have lived amply explain the extreme vividness with which they recall the past. A farmer's wife, for instance, in this neighbourhood died at the age of eighty-three in the house where she was born, never having slept out of it, except for one night by way of a wedding tour.

One crippled, semi-paralysed old woman who had spent most of her married life on the Heath, was never weary of telling how more than forty years ago she started the complaint from which she has suffered ever since. Her recital never varied in the slightest degree, and however often it was repeated, there was no lack of appropriate gesture and animation as she recalled that fatal day when her cow, breaking its horn in a gate, galloped like a mad thing over the Heath, she running behind it through the mud in a hastily slipped on pair of men's boots that came off and were left behind long before the chase was over. And then her lamentations, and all that was said and done whilst she bandaged up the poor cow's horn, never giving a thought to the wet clothes in which she was standing herself for so many hours, which nevertheless had their revenge in transforming her from an active young woman to a helpless cripple. It vies in clearness with the other dread recollection of her life, namely, how when she was a girl out in service there was much talk of the Chartists and their terrible doings, and how rough bands of men used to come round asking for money, which was always given without a murmur, for no one knew whose haystack or even house would next be burnt. Then came the well-remembered relief when they all assembled by the newly-made railroad to see the soldiers passing in open trucks, like a flash of red, going to put down the Chartists. In her own eyes probably the act of greatest daring she ever accomplished was once going a short railway journey, an experience she looked forward to with great excitement, but which she found so alarming that she never repeated it. Of late years, indeed,

she has become entirely bedridden, her limbs being sadly contorted with rheumatism, a fact which gives her considerable anxiety respecting the orderly performance of her funeral rites. "There! I often think they'll find it mortal hard to lay me out as they should," she says, with that curious openness on the subject of her own decease that is quite embarrassing. In certain classes of society the contemplation of the preparations for their own obsequies seems quite a pleasant source of interest to invalids. I was once commending a woman for the kindly way in which I had seen her hurrying out at night across the fields to succour an old neighbour who was dying. "Well, it was this way," she explained. "Poor John had made me promise times and times that I'd lay him out and no one else. So when I heard he was took for death, I just started off as I was. Yea, he wasn't quite gone when I got there, so he'd see I hadn't forgotten." It must, she evidently felt, have been a practical consolation to his last moments to see that she was on the spot ready to take charge of his remains.

Illness seems to accentuate more forcibly than anything the characteristically different ideals of comfort that are entertained by various classes. An acquaintance on the Heath last winter elected to struggle through a long and very serious illness lying on six chairs in front of the kitchen fire. There was some doubt about whether the fire in the bedroom would burn properly, and some difficulty about moving the bed downstairs; whilst the chairs, with their legs roped together so as not to slip apart, and covered with a mattress, made, it appears, a sufficiently comfortable bed, at least the patient infinitely preferred it to the isolation of a bedroom.

One infirm old man on the Heath used to take to his bed for days together during the winter, when the field in which his cottage stood was completely flooded. As soon as the water rose high enough to put out his kitchen fire, he would retire upstairs with what food he had in the house, and lie in bed to keep himself warm. When the floods have lasted unusually long, a kindly neighbour has been known to wade through the water to enquire whether the lonely old man was all right, and bring him a rare luxury in the shape of a cup of tea, handed in through the bedroom window, the key of the door being probably upstairs in his pocket.

The fate of old people in the country is

often unavoidably rather dreary. Even when they are in the main kindly treated, they endure a great deal of inevitable neglect owing to the isolation of the dwellings. One person I knew was accustomed to lock her bedridden old father into the empty house and carry off the key, when she went once a week to market: feeling that she was thus guarding against the only possible danger, namely, of tramps breaking in during her absence. Yet this extreme loneliness happily does not seem to strike those who are used to it. An old widow on the Heath lived absolutely by herself in a cottage which was condemned as unfit for human habitation, but which she contrived to retain as a home in preference to joining other members of her family in more inhabited spots. Quite crippled with rheumatism and almost blind, she yet clung with passionate love to the old place where she was always sure of being undisturbed and free from observation. It was in vain that her son, a well-to-do man, living in one of a respectable row of brick houses in a large village, begged her to give up the old hovel and make her home with him and his family. After a short visit she always returned to her chosen abode, literally worried away by the unaccustomed noise and fuss of so many neighbours. Probably, also, she was keenly aware of the advantages of having one's own home, be it ever so poor. As another old person once said to me, under somewhat similar circumstances: "My niece and her husband want me to go and live along with them, but what I think on is my own fireside. If I went there, and after all they should look dark on me, 'twould be sudden death." But my old friend on the Heath was spared the pain of ever receiving grudging hospitality. How she contrived to support herself at the last was a perfect mystery, even to her neighbours. They were all kind to her, for she was about the only really poor person amongst them; and they spoke of her with a certain respect, knowing that much of her life she had toiled unceasingly, mostly at hard field work for the farmers, and so contrived to keep a husband many years older than herself out of the workhouse until his death at over ninety. When it is taken into consideration that for the last fifteen years of his life he can have been nothing but an expense, this was really a remarkable feat.

She was devoted to the old man, though towards the last he became quite childish and could not stir from the chimney corner. "But a husband's a husband," she would

say, "and when he's gone and you've got naught but the four walls to look at, you know the difference." Lovingly she used to recall his childish fondness for sweets, and how the clergyman would make him happy by little treats of dried raisins; dwelling affectionately on the old man's simple cunning in finding these dainties when she was out, however safely they were put away. She was alone in the cottage with the old man when he died; the neighbours were kind, but the houses on the Heath are far apart, and the little farms do not admit of much absence from home. Some ten years later she lay ill in the same room, the only bedroom of the cottage. Her distress was very great, for a passer-by having discovered her condition, the doctor had been summoned, and had given the order for her immediate removal to her son's house. Indeed it did not appear that recovery was possible lying in this mere shed, the thatch and the floor being equally decayed, so that one could literally see the clouds above and the kitchen beneath, as one sat by her bedside. The precipitous wooden steps came up in the middle of the bedroom, about the only place where one could stand upright, and as they were not shut off by any door, the draught from below may be imagined. But a little draught more or less hardly seemed to matter in a dwelling so dilapidated that its occupant constantly used to hobble out and spend the night in the garden when there was much wind blowing, for fear the whole place should collapse and crush her. However, now wet actually fell upon the bed, according to the old woman, who regarded her threatened removal in the light of an act of tyranny, for since she had partially lined the rotten thatch with scraps of floorcloth begged from a shop, she considered the room rendered quite habitable. The neighbours regarded the old place with such horror that they were afraid to stay alone in it with the sick woman after dark, and the difficulty of getting any one to look after her led at last to her giving an unwilling consent to the move. A terrified grand-daughter was sent for, to stay with her for the day or two whilst the necessary arrangements were being made, and in the darkness of the night the neighbours were roused by the girl's cries as she ran shrieking across the fields, having awoke to find her grandmother lying dead by her side. Seeing that the old woman's sole wish had been to end her days on the Heath, there did not seem much cause for lament as far as she was concerned.

This was evidently the opinion of a relative who appeared on the scene in the course of the day, and who reserved all pity for her own hard case.

"There's some folks get all the trouble and expense!" she said complainingly. "That's three corpses we've had to do for in three years!"

When there is not much affection involved, cottagers are apt to be terribly outspoken. But as it happened, the old widow's funeral was conducted on a scale quite out of proportion to the attention she had excited during her lifetime. The religious sect to which she belonged came forward and buried her in great style, to the wondering admiration of the neighbours.

"It must have been quite a show for them the other end of the Heath, what with a mourning coach coming up the lane and all!" enviously remarked an old dame, who was precluded by the distance and her infirmities from witnessing any part of the ceremony.

The element of discord on the Heath was an old woman who had been born there, and who, after disappearing for many years, and carrying on mysterious occupations in foreign parts, had returned with sufficient money to buy herself a house with a few surrounding acres of land. Why out of the whole world she selected the Heath as a place of residence it is difficult to divine, for the land was miserably poor, and she was not on speaking terms with any of her neighbours. A lifelong feud reigned between her and a brother, who occupied another of the little holdings, and it was sad to see these two lonely old people, each leading a life of solitary discomfort, within half a mile of one another. The old woman, who was of gigantic stature, and indescribably repulsive appearance, was a source of much terrified speculation to her neighbours. When she talked at all of her past life, she threw out such vaguely alarming hints that it was currently reported that she had been something of a slave-driver on a sugar plantation! Her appearance, language, and dress would certainly have justified any supposition; and her habits, though not necessarily criminal, were so peculiar as to excite suspicion. With bated breath it was reported that she had no bed in the house, but slept in a hammock she had brought off a ship; and that the one table had been made at home out of rough pieces of cord-wood. At the same time she had a passion for increasing the stock she kept on her little farm, until the poor creatures became

mere skin and bone for want of food. Much of her warfare with the other inhabitants rose from her choosing to regard the grass lane that crossed the Heath as her own exclusive property, solely to be grazed by her cows. The most animated fights took place over this piece of common land, resulting in black eyes and summonses. The real offender, however, got off far more lightly than she deserved, as the magistrates were disarmed by the portrait she drew of herself as a poor lone woman, working hard for her living. This statement was indeed literally true, as sooner than abandon her claim to the lane she would take her cows out there after dark, and wait about whilst they grazed, preferring the chance of a little extra gain to resting after a hard day's work. To increase the existing terror of her she tried to persuade people that she had the power of what she called "putting bad wishes upon them"; but happily the neighbours had the sense to see that this was manifestly untrue, or they would none of them have been alive.

Keeping cows gives the people on the Heath unusual facilities for making a little money by taking stray children to nurse. The pay for doing this is about three shillings a week, but there is always considerable risk in these cases of the money gradually decreasing, and at last stopping altogether. Of course the remedy is obvious, to return the child to its parents, or if they cannot be found, as is sometimes the case, then send it to the workhouse. It is pleasant to observe that the foster parents often become so fond of their charge that they are unwilling to adopt either of these courses. An old couple on the Heath have in this way brought up a boy practically as their own son, without receiving any payment from his parents for years. The mother put him out when a baby, as she had been deserted by her husband, and was forced to go out to service. When the child was two or three years old she came to visit him, and appeared much vexed at finding that he had forgotten her completely. The old woman excused him as best she could, at the same time thinking this display of anger towards a mere baby very unreasonable. Presently the mother went on to explain that as she could not afford to pay any longer for the boy, she had come to take him away. The old woman was loth to part with him, having, it seems, an indefinable suspicion that all was not right; moreover, the child clung to her as being the person who had brought it up. However, there seemed no help for it;

the foster mother handed over her charge and went indoors. In another moment she was out again, attracted by the boy's cries of distress, and found the mother beating him in the lane for not following her more willingly.

"Then it came over me all of a sudden," says the old woman, "that she was only taking him off to make away with him!"

She seized the child, and bringing him indoors, absolutely declined to part with him in spite of the mother's wild words and threats. Whether the old woman's fears were justified it is impossible to say, but as the poor mother shortly afterwards died a raving lunatic, it is not improbable that the boy's life was saved by the devotion of his foster parents.

When talking to an old couple in one of the cottages on the Heath, I once met a married daughter, home on a visit, whose experiences of life were most amusingly different from those of her parents. Her husband had an excellent post as valet to a foreign Ambassador, resident in London, where he was so constantly in the habit of seeing Royal personages, that it appears he was no longer in awe of them, or even particularly interested in their doings.

"Why, there," stated his wife, "Brown always says Kings and Queens are only like any other ladies and gentlemen when you get used to them!"

Of the glories of the Embassy she gave me a passing glimpse by observing that "all the gentlemen there are barons or Princes — mostly Princes!" And what brought home the contrast most of all was when she produced a bit of genuine wedding cake from the last Royal wedding for the old people on the Heath to taste. I hardly think they were so much impressed by this astounding familiarity with great people as I was. London itself appears such a legendary place when regarded from a country cottage, that once there the society of a few Kings and Queens is rather what one might expect! One thing is certain: that in spite of the loneliness, the constant toil, and the still more constant damp, there are probably none of the dwellers on the Heath who would change their muddy lane and tumble-down cottages for a comfortable town house, approachable by a good stone pavement.

THE FEVER TREE.

THE odour of Eucalyptus oil is now as familiar throughout the land as household

words. As a febrifuge, and as an alleviator of, if not a cure for, that commonest and most troublesome of all the ills that flesh is heir to—a cold in the head—many people have come to esteem the pungent fumes. Long as the hygienic qualities of the plant have been known in other climes, the popularity of the *Eucalyptus* here is of comparatively recent growth. It has, however, been of very rapid development, and as everybody now knows the oil, and has had some experience of its virtues, we have thought that our readers may be interested in learning something about the plant from which the oil is derived.

The *Eucalyptus* best known is the “blue-gum”—*Eucalyptus globulus*—of Australia. As a tree it is remarkable for its resistance to drought and for its rapid growth, for which reasons it has been found invaluable in arid Australia, in relieving the dreariness of otherwise treeless landscapes. Its timber has been called “soft and spongy” by some American arboriculturists, and though good enough for firewood, not good enough for tools; but other people think that the virtues of *Eucalyptus* timber have not yet been properly appreciated. The jarrah, for instance, which abounds in Western Australia, and which is now coming largely into use in this country for wood-paving and other purposes in which a very hard, close-grained wood is needed, belongs to the *Eucalyptus* tribe. And no known “borer” of the insect world has ever yet succeeded in riddling a jarrah block or pile.

It is said that the *Eucalyptus* was first discovered by a French botanist in Tasmania—then Van Diemen’s Land—in 1788. Whether he brought it to Europe or not we are not aware, but early in the present century the *Eucalyptus* was being cultivated in the gardens of Malmaison—only, however, as a botanical curiosity.

In Australia the blue-gum grows to an immense size—even up to four hundred feet—but as the leaves grow vertically they do not afford much shade. These leaves are tough, almost leathery, in texture, and are covered with transparent spots. The flower is yellow, and is enclosed before budding in a very curious envelope, which is the distinctive mark of this species. It exhales a strong balsamic odour. In Europe, the tree attains a height of about one hundred and fifty feet, and seems to flourish best on sandy soil, or near the sea.

There is another species of resinous *Eucalyptus*, the fruit of which is in Australia used as a spice. It has flexible, drooping

branches, something like the weeping willow, and it has a thick bark which is extensively used for roofing cabins. The trunk yields a red sap, rich in gum and sugar, and from its leaves is distilled a valuable essential oil. This is the *Eucalyptus poivré*, and there is also another variety which does not grow to a great height; whose branches are large and spreading; and whose roots, lying for the most part above ground, yield a clear white fluid. This is the Tasmanian Cider-tree.

In Europe it has been found that the *Eucalyptus* thrives best in latitudes south of the forty-fourth parallel, while it flourishes remarkably well in North Africa.

The reason of this is that as a tropical plant the *Eucalyptus* cannot stand the rigours of an ordinary European winter. In the South of France a great many varieties have been tried, but only a few have been found capable of resisting the low winter temperature. Experience goes to show that successful cultivation cannot be expected where the winter maximum of cold exceeds 21·2 degrees to 17·6 degrees Fahrenheit. About Marseilles the *Eucalyptus globulus* is now tolerably abundant, and at Hyères the greatest success has been obtained in acclimatising other varieties. It is doubtful, however, if it is cold alone that has prevented the acclimatisation of other species, for it is certain that some kinds do not flourish on European soil under any circumstances.

The author of “The Chemistry of Common Life” says: “The genus *Eucalyptus*, or gum-tree of the colonists, forms a distinguishing feature in the landscape and forest scenery of Australia and Van Diemen’s Land. At certain seasons of the year, a sweet substance exudes from the leaves of those trees and dries in the sun. When the wind blows so as to shake the trees, this Australian manna is sometimes seen to fall like a shower of snow. Like the true manna, this sweet substance contains a peculiar crystallisable sugar, melital.”

Something like one hundred and fifty varieties of the *Eucalyptus* have been found in its native home, but very many of the distinctions are such as botanists only notice. Besides the “globulus” one of the best known and most useful varieties is the “*Eucalyptus resinifera*,” the juice of which is known as Botany Bay Kino, and is, like Indian Kino, largely used in medicine as an astringent. Taken altogether the family have very remarkable qualities, and have a distinct reputation of their own

among trees—for their juices, their timber, their rapid powers of growth, and their faculty for absorbing the water of wet and swampy ground, whereby it is made fit for cultivation.

It is the rapid growth and the reputed property of eliminating malarial conditions where it is planted that have directed the attention of Europeans to it, and have led to extensive planting in France, Algeria, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Corsica, as well as about the European colonies in West and South Africa. But while these experiments have been made for one purpose, other uses have been found. Thus from some six or seven varieties a material is obtained for the manufacture of packing-paper; one variety has a bark which is now largely used in the manufacture of blotting-paper; and several yield not only the essential oil of the drug stores, but also essences much esteemed by perfumers. The bark is being extensively used in tanning, the fibres in cordage and mat-making, and the timber is coming into favour for carriages and furniture. We have even heard that in Australia the oil is being used as an illuminant because of its brilliant and inodorous flame. Clearly the Eucalyptus is a most valuable tree—especially as it will, even in Europe, attain a height of thirty feet or so in three or four years.

But now as to the antiseptic qualities of the tree itself, as apart from the essential oils distilled from it. As to this there is considerable difference of opinion. We have been told that in the South of France the people eagerly gather up the branches at pruning time to hang up in their bedrooms to keep off fevers; and on the other hand we have seen positive statements by Italian scientists that the reputed virtue of the Eucalyptus grove is all a myth.

As it is in Italy that the most extensive experiments have been made in the hygienic qualities of the tree, we will turn for a moment to that country. The reputed power of the Eucalyptus to dry moist soil, and its property of distributing a balsamic atmosphere, led to the planting of many thousands of trees on malarial land in Italy, both by private individuals and by public corporations. According to some accounts, a certain measure of success seems to have attended some of the experiments, though we are afraid that exaggerated expectations of beneficial results have been entertained.

The Adriatic Railway Company began some fifteen years ago to plant about ten

thousand Eucalypti at its stations and along the line, and it is said that the experiment has proved "perfectly satisfactory."

The railway station at Ventimiglia is in a malarial district, and some seven or eight hundred trees were planted round it and along the banks of the Roia. Within a few years, it is said, the malarial fever disappeared, and the result is attributed to the perfume exhaled by the trees.

Again, in the Campagna Romana, where malaria is notoriously prevalent, the Trappist monks planted a large number of the blue-gum variety, and within seven years found the climate so much improved that they were able to take up permanent residence at the monastery. It was upon this that the Government instituted an official enquiry, which resulted in further extensive experiments elsewhere, until now there are upwards of one hundred thousand Eucalypti flourishing in Italy. But for all that, malaria is still prevalent: though, it is said, in a less degree than formerly.

And here it may be pertinent to enquire—what is malaria? According to Professor Crudeli, a distinguished Italian scientist, who made an exhaustive investigation into the disease, and who published a book on the subject a few years ago, malaria is produced, not in water, but in the soil. We must get rid, he says, of the traditional belief that it is produced by the putrefaction of dead vegetable and animal organisms in stagnant water, or in marshes. In Italy the word malaria seems to be applied to all intermittent fevers, but Italy is peculiarly subject to one particular kind of fever that Crudeli ascribes to malarial ferment in the soil. Water is only a factor in producing malaria by freeing the germs, but water may be a preventive if it thoroughly covers, instead of only moistening, the malarial soil.

It is all due to those wretched microbes who seem to cause all diseases nowadays, and the "bacillus malariae," according to Professor Crudeli, may flourish in any soil—alluvial, volcanic, or sandy. It dwells, as we are to understand, in nearly all soils, but a minimum temperature of 68 degrees Fahrenheit, a certain amount of moisture, and the action of the atmosphere on the soil, are necessary to its development. It may be prevented from spreading by interrupting the communication of the soil with the atmosphere, either by covering the ground with water or by grasses. It may also be prevented by withdrawing the moisture from the soil by drainage.

Such is the Crudeli theory; and Crudeli says he found in dry as well as in marshy soils the malarial germ, the living parasite which "attacks the red globules of the blood and destroys them, after having produced in them a series of characteristic alterations which indicate with certainty the existence of malarial conditions."

This theory is disputed, of course, as all theories are, but, supposing it to be sound, then the idea of counteracting malaria by means of Eucalyptus trees is vain. They may dry up marshy lands, but they will not destroy the miasmatic emanations. Still we do not find that Crudeli altogether scouts the value of the Eucalyptus—he only offers a warning against the blinding of judgement by exaggerations. His theory certainly finds support in Professor Liversidge, of Sydney, who has stated that in Australia there are forests of Eucalypti in which malaria reigns supreme.

Let us return to the Roman Campagna, where the planting was begun by the monks in 1870, or thereabouts. In seven years, that is about 1877, they returned to the monastery and the plantations were extended. In 1880 the Government established a convict colony on the lands near the monastery which were supposed to have been hygienised by the plantations. Nearly the whole of these convicts went down with malaria, though the peasants of the Campagna outside of the area of planting escaped from it. This was in 1880, and in 1882 there was a renewal of the plague, but this time the Trappists and the convicts only suffered slightly, while the guards were severely smitten and had to be removed. Then Professor Crudeli stepped in and induced the Government to order the suspension of all work during the malarial season, because it was then that the disturbance of the soil set free the germs. But curiously enough, it was not those who worked with the soil who suffered most, but those who stood about and did nothing.

The physician in charge of the convict colony in the Campagna, Dr. Montechiare, has recently declared to the United States Consul-General at Rome—who was requested by the authorities at Washington to enquire into the matter, in connection with a project for planting Eucalypti in America—that his experience justifies him in saying that "no beneficial result against malaria has been derived from the planting of the Eucalyptus." He says that the monks planted fifty thousand trees on a few acres, and that had the efficacy of the

tree been real, the entire settlement of Tre Fontane would have become a wholesome balsamic Eden. This, he says, has by no means been the case, and he thinks that the efficacy of the Eucalyptus in improving the air is no greater than that of the elm, the pine, or the mulberry. Its only merit, according to him, is that it grows rapidly.

This is certainly disappointing, though not conclusive, for doctors differ, as usual, and we find from other reports that malaria has diminished in other parts of Italy where the Eucalyptus has been planted, though it has not been entirely exterminated.

As bearing on the relation of forests generally to malaria, we may quote Consul-General Jones, of Rome, in his report to Washington: "One of the most generally accepted theories is that forests produce malaria independently of the quality of the soil which they cover. On every hand we meet with forests in which the production of malaria is most abundant, and we find on every hand vast tracts of country which remained uninhabited by reason of malaria so long as they were wooded, and that became more or less completely healthful upon being cleared. These facts are interpreted as showing that malaria is produced in the forests by the putrefaction of the leaves, branches, and dead insects that become accumulated on the ground, and there slowly decompose. But such an explanation cannot stand, because, were such the case, we ought to meet with malaria in every forest of the world where decomposition of organic detritus occurs, whereas, on the contrary, many forests are free from malaria. Forests are factors in an indirect way only; they do not produce it themselves, but favour its development whenever they cover lands that are malarial. They intercept the solar rays, and hence prevent an active evaporation from the soil, so that it retains a great deal of humidity in the warm season. If the soil does not contain the malarial ferment, the forest is not infected, and vice versa. Malarial forests are frequently met with in nature, and the clearing away of these forests has rendered the localities occupied by them much more healthful, if not entirely so."

The Eucalyptus has also been extensively planted in Spain, and there also the globulus, or blue-gum variety, has flourished best; but our only information is, somewhat vaguely, that it has given "most satisfactory results," and that a Spanish authority has

called it "El mejor de los arboles"—the Best of Trees.

The blue-gum was introduced into Southern India so long ago as 1843. It has flourished best on the Nilghiris, where there are now upwards of one thousand five hundred acres of plantations of it. The results are considered so satisfactory from some points of view, that other species are now being planted. Experiments in other parts of India have only been moderately successful, and in the Punjab they have failed, owing to dry seasons, sunburn, and the white ants, which eat away the roots. Only a few hundred trees survive in that province out of several hundred thousand planted. But we learn that in India the Eucalyptus is not esteemed as having value in relieving malarial districts. It is valued as useful in absorbing underground moisture, which it does so effectually that not only small swamps but even springs and streams have been dried up by the planting of Eucalypti near them.

While, however, the value of the Eucalyptus as a fever dispelling tree is disputed, as we have seen, it is in any case a very remarkable and useful plant. And we need not lose faith in Eucalyptus-oil because the growing wood has not exterminated malaria, any more than we should reject Castor-oil because the Castor-plant is not in itself a remedial agent in its native haunts.

THE PLEASURES OF GRIEF.

You would scarcely think there were any such pleasures; yet assuredly there are. They are not, of course, of the ecstatic order of human joys. The sad man does not go capering to his friends with happy smiles, inviting them to share his raptures. He does not tell volubly of his distress and cry openly: "Is it not delightful? Have I not cause for laughter and self-congratulation? Come you and rejoice with me."

Not a bit of it. But there are secret joys as well as manifest ones, and in a surprising number of instances we mortals hug our little woes and gloat over them as if they were blessings. They minister to self-esteem quite as often as they humiliate us.

The other day I was in the cemetery of my native town, and observed two women who stood by the edge of a deep clayey hole, designed for a dozen or more of the poor.

The women were in decent black, and tears streamed from their eyes. They

seemed totally indifferent to the three or four bystanders who stared first into the grave's grim profundities, and then at the chattering mourners by its mouth.

"It's hard believing as he's gone—the good steady man as he was—and me now just a widow, with myself to look to for everything," sobbed the one woman.

"It is, poor dear," said the other, "and you with six little children to provide for!"

"One a cripple, and little Janey no better nor a corpse herself!"

"And all the money that's owing for the doctor, and the burying, and——"

"And he never to have thought of being in no club, Betsy, that's the worst of all, when he might have done it so easy any time the last year."

"Well, well, my love, it's no use thinking of it," urged the other.

"But," wailed the widow, "it does me good to do it, and I'm sure if he's alive to see us, it'll do him good too."

After this I strolled elsewhere. It did her good! Precisely. The dispensation seems a strange one, but there's no denying that it might operate in a worse way.

While I was retracing my steps I clashed with a family party carrying three or four wreaths, and all in the most garrulous and gay of moods. I knew the eldest of the women by sight. She, too, had lost her husband recently. But she seemed as expectant and eager in this visit to his grave as if she were going to the theatre to see a lively play. The children laughed loud. There is not the smallest question that the entire family had looked forward to this mourning visit for the past day or two. At the grave they would shed a few tears, murmur a few tender words—all congenial to their emotions—and afterwards go home refreshed.

To turn to a less dismal subject. In my younger days I was cursed by two or three years' experience of school under a Rhadamanthine pedagogue. The monster had well-developed muscles, and he dearly loved his birch. As for us youngsters, we had no false modesty about us, nor were we troubled by a sense of weakness when we shed tears after our frequent castigations.

The method of things was this. The boy or boys destined for the day's birching, which took place in the hour's interval between morning school and dinner, stayed in the big schoolroom. They watched the pedagogue slowly settle his books, go to the cupboard where the birches were kept, and push the flogging stool towards them

with his dapper foot. All the while they wept like Niobe.

Afterwards they were turned loose into the playground, where their appetite for play was small. But—I write from personal knowledge—though they cared, for the moment, nothing at all about bats and balls, they fondly enjoyed being interrogated in detail about their sufferings. “Did he hit hard? Was he more passionate than common? Was he brutal enough to try those curling cuts which made a fellow sting so horribly?” and so forth.

I declare, on the honour of my memory, there was a certain very real element of rapture in the recounting of these particulars. We wept, even when the thrashing was over; but they were then tears of pride and pleasure.

It is the same in calamities of a much larger kind.

I know a man who, some little while ago, dropped, in one fell swoop, from affluence to poverty. It was his own fault. He played the extremely arrant fool as a speculator: put all his eggs into one basket, which tip-tilted.

On the evening of the day that beggared him, this gentleman came into the club as usual. His face was flushed and his eyes sparkling; otherwise there was nothing exceptional about his appearance.

“Well, old man,” asked some one, “how have you got on?”

“Got on!” he exclaimed, with a tinkling laugh. “I’m clean raked out. Ruin doesn’t spell my condition, and that’s a fact!”

His information was not of the kind to lift him in the esteem of a roomful of worldlings. Yet he persisted in not seeing this, and went on to tell of the stages of his idiocy which had led, with mathematical precision, to the final disaster.

And when he had done he lit a cigar, pushed his hat to the back of his head, and swaggered off to the home he had wrecked.

This same foolish person seems content now to live on the reputation he acquired in this one expensive enterprise. He will buttonhole any stranger on the least provocation and relate the tale of his “misfortunes,” as he calls them.

He seems destined to revel for life in a recollection that ought to harrow him as it harrows his wife, and will, perhaps, harrow his children when they attain an age suitable for such sensations.

I suppose most people have met one or more members of that large class of ladies who remain unwedded all their days be-

cause of an early disappointment in love. It is not worth while considering if this is the genuine cause of their celibate condition. Perhaps they never had but the one offer. Be that as it may; let it suffice that they fondle this particular reverse of expectation as if it were an actual piece of good fortune.

“I might have had him, my dear,” one of these good ladies once said to me over our afternoon tea—I was younger then than now, and she was well on in the sixties—“but there were obstacles in the way; he married Miss B., for her money, of course, and lived only a few years after it. One does not often see such fine men nowadays.”

It amused me in a quiet way to see the dear old soul lean back in her arm-chair—winged, to keep off draughts—and caress her hands as she brooded over the past. If she was not enjoying her grief in the thought of it, I am very much mistaken. Her “Well, well, all is done for the best,” which came from her suddenly after a while, only confirmed me in my convictions. It will divert the reader, I hope, to hear that her next words were a request that I would touch the bell, which meant that her trusted domestic was to bring two half-pint bottles of champagne from her small cellar. She and I drank the fluid quite happily, and I verily believe she thought of her long-dead lover with something of the poet’s art of idealisation while she toyed with her glass. With her, as with many like her, it was clearly

Better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.

That is the secret of much of the pleasurable sensation that attends a retrospective view of past calamity. We learn in time that, though perhaps we suffered acutely then, we might have been treated far more severely by the Fates. After all, it is more congenial to our consciousness to realise that we were deemed worthy of a little adverse notice on the part of Dame Fortune, than to perceive that we have been treated by her with calm, contemptuous indifference. The man whose career is made up of a succession of rebuffs and defeats has at least accumulated an interesting amount of experience. He, if any one, may be listened to with advantage on the subject of human nature.

But of all men perhaps the man of imagination can least dispense with the ingredient of sorrow in his cup of life. To be sure, he suffers extremely when actually engaged in quaffing the draught. Yet it may almost be said that the subsequent reaction

is as exhilarating to him as his previous experience was depressing. He mounts high on his earlier griefs; uses them as a pedestal whence to grasp at what he conceives to be the finer fruits of life. If he is a true artist he distils exquisite contrasted relishes from them. Even as the landsman safe on shore is supposed to appreciate his security the better when he sees a doomed ship struggling with the waves, so our poetic friend, when in port from the troubles of his youth, cuddles himself rapturously as he casts his eye over the disappointments of his more or less turbulent past.

As Keats reminds us:

... in the very temple of delight,
Veiled melancholy has her sovran shrine.

The man who is not entitled to kneel in "veiled melancholy's" shrine when he wills, has not plumbed life's pleasures. To be sure, he may be advised not to do this sweet homage too often. Once in a way, however, it is like opium to a jaded fancy.

Where would our professional pessimists and their vocation be if it were not at least a solace to them to tell over their and poor old humanity's woes on their dismal fingers? I warrant I do not wrong them when I say that they thoroughly enjoy their pastime—or vocation, if you like to dignify it with the name.

"This thing I hoped," says one of them, as he broods with bent brows, "and this other unlooked-for and most undesirable event happened. Was I not ill-used? Is there any mortal who can claim to be more harshly treated? And yet I live on, steeled courageously against the shocks of this unnatural mother of ours, who gives us life only to torment us! The illnesses I have suffered, the women I have loved—all to no purpose, the speculations I have made—mischievously, the bright goals I have striven for and missed! I flatter myself, as I have said, that I am 'facile princeps' among the myriad of other unfortunates in a bad world."

It will be odd if, while he thus bemoans himself, our friend does not smile sweetly. He is favoured, indeed, to have such excellent pretexts for black thought. And perchance at length he rises, stimulated by his very debauch of misery.

Milton's blindness was in no sense a blessing to him, viewed merely as a deprivation. But it opened manifold hitherto sealed chambers of his majestic imagination. Moreover, he was not the poet he was if he did not, like lesser men, find a measure of consolation in a metrical narrative of his losses.

Thus with the year
Seasons return, but not to me returns
Day, or the sweet approach of ev'n or morn,
Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine.

But it is not only in its personal appreciation that grief has to be recognised as something remote from the curse it seems. The greater part of literature is built on the catastrophes of human beings, either in the mass or as individuals. Our circulating libraries would lose their custom if the tragic and the sorrowful were eliminated from the books they disperse among us. There is not a novel to be discovered the plot of which does not pivot on disaster, impending or accomplished.

"Sweet are the uses of adversity," and, it may be added, indispensable also to the maker of fiction. The simple reader does not care to look into himself, and ask why he is so absorbed in the series of calamities and escapes which make up the book he has bought. But he will tell you flatly that he would not give one pin—much less four-and-sixpence—for a book in which all the characters are serene and virtuous, and shielded from affliction in any form from the first page to the last. The more trials they have to undergo the better.

I have, at a moving play, sat next to a young lady whose pocket-handkerchief was at work vigorously throughout half an act. At the dropping of the curtain she would scarcely smile for a minute or two. But when speech returned to her, what do you think were her first words? Simply these: "I am so enjoying it all." And yet she was a tender-hearted, sympathetic girl, who would have fainted with horror in the presence of a newly-stuck pig.

These things are a mystery to the person who has not brought himself reverently to perceive that human nature is not to be understood as one learns the rule for the multiplication of decimals. There is, we are told—and we may guess at the truth of it—even downright gratification in the memory of sin which ought rather to evoke lamentations. It is, I suppose, stranger still that a man can smile to-day at what a year or two ago seemed to tear his vitals.

RICHENDA.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "*The Thirteenth Brydain*," "*Catherine Maidment's Burden*," "*Benefit of Clergy*," "*The Vicar's Aunt*," etc. etc.

CHAPTER VII.

"An awfully pretty girl!"

"Yes, no end pretty!"

"I say, Lucia, just look at that girl over there by herself. She is good-looking, if you like! 'What lovely hair!'"

The comments came from two groups of people who were passing through the entrance hall of the New Gallery on a hot afternoon in the end of June. The girl to whom the words referred was sitting alone on the centre ottoman, studying a catalogue which she had just bought, and evidently waiting for some one. It was Richenda Leicester. She was dressed, not in her nurse's dress, but in a pretty, simple grey frock and hat, such as any girl might wear; and the delicate sombre colour enhanced every tint in her hair and every outline of her face.

It was her first "afternoon out" since she had been in Mrs. Fitzgerald's service, and she had arranged weeks ago to spend it in the New Gallery with a girl who had been a fellow pupil with her at the Training Institution. She was waiting now for the girl to appear.

There was a look of pleasant anticipation on her face; her beautiful eyes shone with a certain happy excitement. All the troubles and difficulties that had weighed so heavily upon her on that cold evening when she had sat looking out of the nursery window; those troubles and difficulties that had rather increased than diminished during the three weeks that had followed; had been left behind for the time in Mrs. Fitzgerald's house. It was the Richenda Leicester of her girlhood at home, a little older for the experience she had gained since then, but still light-hearted and happy, who sat waiting alone this afternoon.

She turned the pages of her catalogue slowly. Richenda knew nothing about pictures; her first acquaintance with any picture-gallery had been made the year before, under the auspices of the same girl for whom she was waiting now. But she had been interested in the pictures she saw then, and she was anxious to find the names of some of the same artists. So she studied it carefully from one end to the other. She shut it suddenly as she reached the end; a consciousness came over her all at once that she had been waiting for a long time. She took out her little old worn silver watch and looked at it. It was half-past three. Bessie Langton had promised to be waiting for her there at three.

Richenda began to look about her with some surprise. She scanned the little moving groups curiously in hopes of seeing

among them the tall figure and good-natured dark face for which she was looking. But they were nowhere visible. Richenda began to wonder whether her friend had missed her somehow.

Perhaps Bessie had passed her, and gone round into the rooms to look for her, she thought. And she took up her catalogue and the same little worn sunshade she had carried on the top of the omnibus the day she was engaged by Mrs. Fitzgerald, and set out to make a pilgrimage through the rooms in search of Bessie Langton. She did not know her way about well. Even those three rooms were very confusing to her, and it was quite half an hour before, a trifle weary and dispirited, she returned, unsuccessful, to her ottoman. She sat down on the side facing the door, and kept her eyes fixed on the entrance. She noticed, without paying any special attention to it, the figure of a man standing alone near the turnstile, evidently, like herself, waiting for some one's arrival. He stood with his back towards Richenda, very patiently watching the little stream of people who came in. Several times Richenda's eyes wandered; and she took one more little rapid walk through the rooms; but whenever she looked in that direction he was still there. She had become quite interested in the man whose fate was so evidently the same as her own, when all at once he turned, and Richenda saw that it was Sir Roderick Graeme who was coming slowly into the hall. He did not see Richenda. His eyes were fixed on something on the opposite wall above the level of her head.

Richenda was divided between three feelings. A wonder whether he would know her in her different dress; a hope that he would not recognise her; and again a hope that he would. The three were all struggling for the mastery when Sir Roderick lowered his eyes suddenly, and saw her.

Richenda tried to remember afterwards what sort of look it was that she had seen flash into them, but she did not think about it at the time. She was quite disengaged and rather amused as she wondered what he would do.

As she met his eyes Richenda bowed instinctively, a little dignified bow such as might have been given by any one of the women of Sir Roderick's own set, and apparently quite as instinctively he lifted his hat.

His manner was a trifle embarrassed

and uncertain; he seemed to be not quite sure of his ground.

He came up to her.

"How do you do?" he said. "I did not know—are the children here?"

Richenda laughed. Having bowed and so almost involuntarily committed herself, she felt that there was no course open to her but to go on in the way she had thus begun. She could not after that bow relapse into the servant. However much it might have been her duty to do so, she had cut off the possibility.

"Oh, no," she said. "It is my holiday, and I am here all by myself. I am waiting for a friend who has not appeared."

"So am I," he responded eagerly.

It seemed a trivial thing to produce such an effect, but Richenda's laugh had, as it were, set the position between the two. The young man's embarrassment dropped from him suddenly; he took up without hesitation the part marked out for him by the pretty matter-of-course assurance of the sound.

"I've been waiting nearly an hour," he said, "for another fellow who was coming to help me do my duty by these pictures. But I don't suppose for a moment he'll turn up now. Have you done the pictures?" he added, "Or are you going round without your friend?"

"No," said Richenda, "I've not seen anything. I don't quite know what to do. I don't think I shall wait any longer."

"Oh, but you won't go away without seeing the pictures, will you?"

"I don't think I shall wait," repeated Richenda a little dispiritedly. She had looked forward so much to her holiday, and now it seemed doomed to end in nothing but disappointment.

Sir Roderick was standing in front of Richenda looking down at her. For a moment he seemed to hesitate.

"There's a picture you ought to see," he said at length. "It's one of that new man's, you know; everybody has been talking about it a lot. It's awfully good, they say. Will you—do you care to come and have a look at it?"

Richenda hesitated for a moment. Then she rose suddenly, and gathered up her sunshade and catalogue composedly. There was a little excited flush going and coming in her cheeks, but her voice was as composed as her movements, as she said simply:

"Thank you. I should like to see it, certainly."

"We may as well fight our way to it, then," he said smilingly.

But there was no "fighting" actually in the question. The rooms were growing very full, but there was really plenty of room to move about; and Richenda did not stand in any literal need of the skilful elbowing by which her companion made way for her among the people.

"Do you like pictures?" Sir Roderick said as they entered the first room.

"I don't know anything about them, I'm afraid!" she answered with a little smile.

"Neither do I," he returned confidentially. "Not a thing! I know what I like, that's all! And the things I like never are by any chance the things I ought to like, don't you know?"

"What does it matter?" said Richenda gaily. "What is the use of having likes and dislikes if one mayn't use them as one wishes? There's room for a great deal more originality in the world."

"It's awfully nice of you to put it like that!" he returned. "It's quite gratifying to be made out to be original, instead of being called an outer barbarian because one can't swallow purple skies and straw-coloured hair! I've listened to such rotten talk about pictures! But, look here, we aren't giving our mind to our duty!"

The two had walked, during Sir Roderick's words, half across the first room, and had, it seemed, instinctively directed their steps to the ottoman in the middle.

"This won't do, you know!" he added. "If we once sit down we shall never get through the show. It's fatal. Let's go religiously round, and then we can talk them over in peace, or forget them if we want to. Will you have my catalogue?" he added. "Oh, you've got one!" as Richenda smilingly opened her own. "Very well, let's fire away! Number one's in that direction, if I'm not mistaken."

They went through the first twenty pictures or so in absorbed concentration; Richenda carefully referred from every number on every picture to its corresponding description in the catalogue, with her whole mind exercised in scrupulously seeing everything. Her slight figure had never looked more graceful or more girlish than it looked at this moment, as, with her pretty head in its simple hat bent first over her catalogue and then thrown back with a quick movement, she moved slowly along from picture to picture. Her grace, and a certain originality about her beauty, made her,

in spite of her rigidly simple frock, conspicuous among the crowd of smartly dressed women who moved round the room with her, and a great many pairs of eyes were fixed upon the charming, unpretending little grey figure. Sir Roderick discovered this fact very suddenly.

During the ten minutes or so that Richenda had spent in studying the pictures he had been occupied in studying her. He could not have said how he began to do so or why, but his position, a little behind hers, had given him an excellent opportunity of looking, unobserved, at his companion. And after his cursory inspection of the first few pictures he had fixed his eyes on Richenda. He had never removed them again until a movement of hers made him fancy that she was about to turn to speak to him. Then he hurriedly looked away from her, to become aware of what he angrily called "the insolent idiots" who were interested in her also. He could not have said why he was angry with the men and women in question, nor did he trouble his head to think; he simply moved a little nearer to Richenda, prepared to speak to her. He meant, he said to himself, to show the world in general that he "would not have her stared at!"

But his intention was frustrated by Richenda herself. She turned her pretty face to him smilingly.

"Look!" she said, "is that the sort of picture one ought to like? I think it's lovely."

The picture in question was an evening landscape, the colouring was very orthodox, and the sentiment of the whole thing was very simple and peaceful.

"I don't know anything about 'ought,'" he said, "but that's just what I like! We seem to like exactly the same sort of thing!"

Richenda looked at him; there was a little pleased smile of acquiescence on her face, a little light in her eyes.

"So we do!" she exclaimed. Then she applied herself to the study of her catalogue again rather diligently; a pink flush mounted to the roots of her hair, and they finished the rest of that room in silence.

On entering the next room Sir Roderick sturdily refused to make a deliberate round.

"We've done our duty by the others," he said. "They are all the same; let us go for the big picture."

Richenda assented and they made their way through the crowd to the "big picture." It was simple enough; if it had not been

the work of a new and unconventional painter it might have been called commonplace. It was the old, old story in its most ordinary form: a coy, reluctant girl had just made up her mind to accept the eager young man who was looking so anxiously into her face. The figures were in startlingly striking dress, but the faces were clever.

Sir Roderick and Richenda stood and looked at it in silence.

"Awfully nice for him," Sir Roderick said at last.

As he spoke he looked down at Richenda, and something in his tone gave his words a meaning for her. They seemed to thrill her curiously, and she felt herself grow first cold and then hot all over. It was ridiculous, she told herself.

"Will you come and sit down?" she said to Sir Roderick. "I believe I'm rather tired."

"I'm most awfully sorry," he said anxiously. "Come and find a comfortable seat. I've walked you about too much, that's what it is."

He established her most carefully on an ottoman nearly opposite the picture, and sat down beside her. A little silence ensued. Richenda was still looking at the picture opposite to her. Suddenly she gave a little exclamation.

"Oh!" she said; "do you see that picture up there, on the right-hand side of the big one? It's just like a bit of the road at home."

"At home?" repeated Sir Roderick gently, his eyes following hers to a little sketch of country road in the winter moonlight.

"Yes, at my home," she repeated eagerly. "I mean, it was my home."

A keen light dawned in Sir Roderick's eyes; the light of interest.

"Where was it?" he asked.

"Home? Oh, it was in Hampshire. Farnbridge is where we used to live when father was alive."

Richenda's beautiful eyes were soft with thought. She was evidently far away from the New Gallery and from the man by her side. He looked at her curiously.

"Your father is dead, then?" he said sympathetically. "And you are quite alone?"

"Yes," Richenda answered simply. "I mean, father died two years ago nearly. But I'm not alone. I've got the boys, you know."

"Are the boys your brothers?"

Sir Roderick's voice was as much interested as were his eyes. He was watching Richenda's face intently. It was changing so rapidly; it had altered in the last few minutes from its ordinary self-possession to an eager girlishness he had not seen in it before.

"Oh, yes! They're my brothers!" she said. "Jack—he's the eldest, you know—wants to be a doctor so dreadfully. I do hope we shall be able to manage it somehow for him! And the twins, Bobby and Jim, you know, they're at school, too; but they're only quite young still, so I don't know what they want to be; they don't know themselves. But whatever they are, any of them, I'm going to live with them all some day and keep house for them. Oh, it will be so lovely! And I shall be so economical, and manage their money so nicely. And I'm going to save my own to help buy some furniture!"

"Great Scott!" Sir Roderick spoke under his breath. Richenda's castle in the air seemed to the young man so pathetic in its modesty. "To think that such a girl as she is," he said to himself, "should have nothing to look forward to but keeping house for three uninteresting brothers, and one of them a struggling doctor! Heavens, what a life!"

A sudden longing shot across Sir Roderick's heart; a wild notion it was, and quite insane, he told himself afterwards. He was seized with a great desire to keep in his own life the girl whose sweetness and simplicity had attracted him in this past hour more than any other qualities in any other woman had attracted him before; to have her speak of him and think of him as she spoke of these three brothers of hers.

"I do believe," he said to himself slowly, "that I could make her happy."

While he was thinking all this, Richenda had pulled out her watch.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, with a little start of dismay. "Oh, it's a quarter to six! I was to be in by six, and I forgot all about the time! What shall I do? What will Mrs. Fitzgerald say?"

The last words sent a figurative dash of cold water on to Sir Roderick's thoughts and misgivings. With a great start he remembered that the girl to whom he had been talking all the afternoon; the girl he had found so attractive; was, after all, only in the position of a paid servant. The realisation was a shock to him, and for a moment it swept away every other

idea, and he could think of nothing else. The next moment a strong rush of reaction took possession of his heart and brain. What did such things as that matter, when a girl was so nice, and so sweet, and a lady, he said to himself. It was all arbitrary nonsense.

But this reactionary impulse subsided as quickly as it had arisen. Sir Roderick's life and position had surrounded him with a fence of conventionalities far too strong to be trodden down so rapidly. It was a pity, he thought, a dreadful pity, but after all it was so, and it must be all right. He had been very silly about her, and it was just as well he had recollected himself in time. That was all.

But the satisfying reasonableness of this last reflection did not seem to convey itself to him forcibly enough to give him any great amount of self-possession. His manner and his voice were both very embarrassed as he turned to Richenda, and said confusedly:

"Oh, is it? I'm awfully sorry you must go! Had you better have a cab, or will you catch an omnibus all right?"

Richenda could scarcely believe her ears. His hesitating, uncertain air and voice were altogether irreconcilable with those of the man who had spent the afternoon with her, and made it so pleasant to her hitherto. She looked at him for one moment in blank surprise. Then, all at once, she understood.

She rose quickly and gathered up her belongings.

"I'll come and see you into your omnibus," he said half deprecatingly.

"No, thank you," she said coldly. "I can manage perfectly well. Good-bye."

She made him the coldest, stiffest little bow, and pointedly did not see that he was prepared to shake hands. Then she turned away, hurried out into Regent Street, and caught her omnibus. But as she sat in the top corner of it, her face turned steadily towards the horses, one or two burning tears fell down her hot cheeks on to her grey glove.

CHAPTER VIII.

"VERONICA! Veronica! What in the world are you doing?"

It was late in the afternoon on the day after Richenda's "afternoon out." The three children were in their mother's boudoir, as she especially liked to call it—a small room opening out of the back drawing-room. There was nothing more artistic or less incongruous about it than

about the drawing-room itself; indeed, except for a large carved overmantel with a mirror on it, very little attempt at decoration of any sort was visible. But no money had been spared, evidently, in making it all its possessor wished it to be with respect to comfort. The chairs, sofas, cushions, lights, were all of the most expensively luxurious kind. It had double windows to shut out, if necessary, the noise of the street, and electric bells and speaking tubes made contact with the rest of the house the work of a moment only.

It was in her boudoir that Mrs. Fitzgerald received her most intimate friends to tea. It was in her boudoir that her most privileged men friends were allowed to smoke and play cards, when the fancy seized their hostess that they should do so. And it was in her boudoir that Mrs. Fitzgerald ensconced herself on days when she did not care to go out; and here, when she was "not at home," she pursued, in the easiest chair in the room, the study of modern French—in novels.

It was by no means unusual for the children to be with her here. Mrs. Fitzgerald was not quite the conventional society mother who never sees her children from one month's end to another. She was, in an injudicious and erratic fashion, very fond indeed of the three pretty little things who called her mother. She was proud of their pretty faces, and felt them to be a distinctly interesting possession, when they did not annoy her. Therefore, though she never let their claims upon her interfere in the least with any engagement she found more amusing, she took pleasure in having them with her once a day, when she was at home and felt inclined to do so.

For more than ten days, however, she had seen very little of them; a rush of engagements had kept her in a whirl which left her no time or thought for the children. To-day, though the rush was not by any means over, a brief lull had come; Mrs. Fitzgerald found herself at home with no prospect of callers, and two hours to spare before she dressed for a select little theatre dinner at a restaurant, to which she was going, and she had had the children brought down to her in the boudoir for an hour. After half an hour's intercourse with them, however, Brian's good temper, never his strongest point, began to flag slightly; his mother instantly discovered that he was amusing no longer. In this conclusion the two innocent girls were included also, and forthwith their mother swept them all off

her lap and out of her chair with an impulsive command to them to "go and play in the balcony." The trio had obediently trotted through the open window into the little fern-filled space outside the window. It was a small square balcony, roofed and protected with glass; the children were perfectly safe there, and Mrs. Fitzgerald had settled herself down in the corner of a sofa and had taken up "The World" with a sigh of relief. For ten minutes she had enjoyed unbroken peace and contentment. But her peace had been broken in upon by loud and aggrieved tones; she had looked up angrily, to see Veronica sitting immovable on the threshold of the window, while Brian, from behind, apparently vainly reasoned and expostulated with her on the desire he felt for her removal from that place and position.

"Veronica!" repeated Mrs. Fitzgerald angrily, as no answer came to her first question, "can't you be quiet? I simply can't and won't have you here if you are such plagues! Why on earth can't you and Brian agree? You're the eldest!"

"We're not unagreeing, mother!"

This answer to Mrs. Fitzgerald's somewhat illogical reasoning came in the most excited tones of her little high voice from Veronica.

"We're not unagreeing one bit! It's only a play-game. I'm being nurse and Brian's being Mr. Kennaway. That's all!"

"The World" dropped from Mrs. Fitzgerald's hands, and she raised herself into a more upright position in her corner.

"What do you mean, child?" she said with a good deal of irritation in her voice. The children's games always irritated her more than they amused her; she couldn't trouble to understand them, she said; and the fact that they should have coupled together in this particular game Richenda Leicester and Mr. Kennaway considerably increased the irritation. "What idiots children are!" she said to herself. "What nonsense you talk!" she continued sharply to Veronica. "Why can't you play a reasonable game? Yours strikes me as very silly indeed!"

Veronica had risen, and she and Brian were facing their mother through the window. They were just a trifle startled at the sharpness of their mother's tone.

"It's a true game, mother—a quite real game! They did just like it one day; they truly did," Veronica said.

"Who did just like what? What are you talking of?"

Mrs. Fitzgerald wheeled herself round on the sofa and looked at the little trio of faces in the window.

"Nursej and Mr. Kennaway. He spoked ever so much. He tried to make her to walk about, I b'lieve; but she never spoked to him, not once. She wouldn't!"

"But what—where have you—where did you see Mr. Kennaway, Veronica? I can't imagine what you mean."

"It was a long ago day," said Brian. "A very long ago day! It was very hot, and it was in South Kensington Museum. And he comed and talked to us and to nursej, and nursej wouldn't talk to him at all. It was very funny. So we was playing at it."

There was a pause after Brian's little explanation. It had been delivered rather breathlessly and both he and Veronica looked alarmed. They thought from their mother's tone that they had been doing something wrong. And they, small as they were, had heavy experience of their mother's scoldings. But there was an expression, at the same time, of blank wonder in both their round childish eyes.

"Are you angry with us for playing a true real game, mother?" asked Veronica at length. She had to wait some little time for her answer, and when it came it was sharply spoken.

"No; I'm not angry. You're silly; very silly children, though. Come out of the window, Brian, and ring for Kate to come and fetch you. I'm going now."

Mrs. Fitzgerald swept out of the room; leaving the children a good deal awed and startled. She went straight up to her own dressing-room, and began, mechanically, to inspect the preparations her maid had made for dressing her. Then she glanced at the little clock on the mantelpiece, saw that she had still a quarter of an hour to spare, and settled herself on her dressing-room sofa as comfortably as she had settled herself in her boudoir. But her face was by no means so placid as it had been a quarter of an hour before. All its slight pretension to beauty was annihilated in a very unbecoming frown, and her small eyes shone more and more angrily. She cast enquiring glances at her own reflection, as shown in a long mirror at the foot of the sofa; and her much disquieted face smoothed a little. Then it clouded again, more darkly than before, nor did it change again until, the quarter of an hour being ended, Mrs. Fitzgerald rose from her sofa, and rang her bell determinedly.

"I don't choose it!" she said, as she did so. "I won't have it go on. I shall speak to her, to-morrow, very severely."

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By MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

Author of "A Valiant Ignorance," "A Mere Cypher,"
"Cross Currents," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXXV.

It was past ten o'clock in the morning, but in North Branstons sitting-room breakfast arrangements were waiting untouched on the table.

The room was not unoccupied, nevertheless. Pacing slowly up and down, with his head bent and his hands clasped behind his back, was Archdeacon French. Now and then he stopped, listening as though for some sound from the adjoining room; only to resume his walk again with a heavy, unconscious sigh.

Archdeacon French had carried out the intention half expressed to the young doctor as they turned away together from North's door on the previous day. He had returned later in the evening; and he had seen North. He had listened to a few brief sentences, before which all human sympathy, even compassion itself, seemed to shrivel into an immeasurable inadequacy. He had found himself in the presence of that which reduced to nothingness all human aid; and before that presence, at North Branstons own request for solitude, he had retreated.

The door which led into the adjoining room opened at last, and as the sound fell on his ear, Archdeacon French turned towards it with a start. No man of delicate perceptions can face the final moment, which brings him into contact with that which the elder man had now to meet, without an awestruck thrill.

It is not the difference created in the

outward personality of a man by the devastating power of a great catastrophe that strikes us first; it is the sameness that confounds us. We know that that which was, is crushed for ever; that that which is to be, is struggling to life in throes only to be guessed at. But the veil of the flesh remains intact. Our physical eyes see only the man whom we saw yesterday; a little paler, a little more haggard, but essentially the same.

The two men met in silence, but it was Archdeacon French alone who was visibly moved. North Branstons was absolutely composed.

"Have you been waiting long?" he said.

His voice was low and toneless, but there was no strain about it.

Archdeacon French shook his head. His eyes were anxiously scanning the other's face, and the grip in which he still held North's hand seemed to represent his hold on his own self-control.

"Have you slept?" he said.

North made a slight, indifferent gesture of negation. Archdeacon French drew away his hand and turned towards the breakfast-table.

"You have not breakfasted," he said. "You had better do it now."

North hesitated a moment. Then he walked up to the tray and poured himself out a cup of coffee. He drank it slowly. Then he took his watch from his pocket, and looked at the time.

It was the simplest everyday movement, and it was performed in the quietest and most matter-of-fact manner. But to Archdeacon French, as he watched the younger man, it came, with its suggestion of the inexorable sequences of time and action, as a sharp spur to the sense that

had brought him to North's side this morning. There was an external aspect to this, as to all other crises in human affairs; an external aspect in which the steady support of a friend might be of some avail, as contrasted with that inward aspect from which friendship might only veil its face. The day must bring with it a train of consequences—those hideous cut-and-dried consequences which follow on the heels of tragedy, and which must be met and dealt with one by one.

Archdeacon French looked at North for a moment in silence.

"What can I do for you, North?" he said.

His tone was eloquent of that which he would not put into words, and North looked round at him with a faint smile as though he heard and understood it from very far off.

"Thank you," he said. "Nothing!"

"You are going to—to——"

"I am going to Wilton Street," assented North.

A moment's silence followed, and just as the elder man was forcing himself to break it, it was broken from without. There was a hasty knock at the door, which was flung open almost on the same instant; and on the threshold, crimson in the face and short of breath, an extraordinary mixture of agitation and pompousness, stood Dr. Vallotson.

"My dear boy!" he exclaimed. "My dear North, it's—it's true, then? Dear, dear! Tut, tut! What does it mean? I said there must be some mistake! I wouldn't believe my own eyes! What does it all mean?"

The ghastly pause that followed was remembered by Archdeacon French to the last day of his life. North Branston had made no attempt to receive Dr. Vallotson; neither by word nor sign had he evinced any surprise at his appearance. He stood gazing at his visitor in absolute silence—gazing at him as though the actual sense of his words were something beside the mark; gazing at him across a gulf which seemed to annul everything but a profound pity.

Interminable as the silence seemed, it was as a matter of fact hardly a moment before Archdeacon French, braced by the necessity for action, stepped forward.

"How do you do, Dr. Vallotson?" he said, with grave kindness, going through the formal greeting and obliging the little doctor to shake hands with him as a means of stilling his excitement. "I am afraid

we must ask you first to tell us what it is that you have heard!"

"Heard!" echoed Dr. Vallotson, turning to him eagerly. "My dear sir, I saw it in the paper yesterday evening! Such a shock it gave me as I may safely say I never experienced in all my life before. I couldn't credit it! Such a—such an outrageous statement! And everybody in Alnchester seemed to have seen the paragraph! Why was I not written to, may I ask? Why was I not telegraphed for?"

"May I trouble you to tell us what the paragraph said?" asked Archdeacon French.

He had glanced quickly at North at the first mention of the evening paper, the anxiety deepening on his face. A newspaper report of the interruption of the marriage service was a contingency which had not occurred to him. But North had heard the words entirely unmoved; the expression of his eyes as they rested on Dr. Vallotson remained unaltered.

The pinkness of Dr. Vallotson's complexion heightened, and his utterance grew almost incoherent in its excitement.

"It was headed 'Exciting Scene at a Fashionable Wedding!'" he said. "At a fashionable wedding, my dear sir! It stated that the marriage ceremony had been stopped at the last moment by a lady who was understood to be the sister of the bridegroom, and it gave the names. There was exaggeration in it, of course—of course! I am taking that for granted. But what has really happened? That is what I want to know! What has really happened?"

There was an angry self-assertion about the elderly, high-pitched voice which was blended with dread; and, as Dr. Vallotson's tones trembled into silence, North Branston moved for the first time. He looked across uncertainly, and with a mute questioning in his face, at Archdeacon French. Archdeacon French responded in his own way.

"Go and keep your appointment, North," he said. "I will explain to Dr. Vallotson."

For a moment North Branston paused. Then he bent his head.

"Thank you!" he said.

And without another word he went out of the room; he went down the stairs and out of the house, composed and quiet still.

There is a state of feeling, when the whole life is crushed, in which the anguish of the process is merged in a dull sense of the power by which it is brought about.

In the shattering of the very foundations of North Branston's world even the rocks,

on which so much that was best in him had met with shipwreck, had sunk beneath him. His life was crushed to atoms. He was a man without a hope; without even a name. But in the upheaval by which this had been brought about the shadow of his life, at which he had girded, against which he had fought, had risen above the sphere of human agency or human strife; had changed into a presence, awful and incomprehensible. Stunned as he was, all that was strongest and best in North Branston had risen up instinctively to meet the force that was about him, in the silence of blind acquiescence.

About the house in Wilton Street, gaily decorated with fresh flowers for the wedding day, there hung a pitifully incongruous air of festivity, but North did not notice it. The door was opened to him directly he rang; the servant who had admitted him hesitated for a moment, and then with a low-toned and rather frightened "This way, sir, please," she led the way to the little room which Lady Karslake had been in the habit of using as a morning-room.

The room was empty, and the woman closed the door upon North and disappeared. North crossed the room mechanically, but he did not sit down. The next instant the door was opened with a rapid, nervous touch; and Lady Karslake appeared. She was crossing the room with swift, impulsive movements to where North Branston stood, when he slowly lifted his head and turned towards her. And as her eyes fell on his face she stopped short.

On a physique such as Lady Karslake's, eighteen hours such as those through which she had just passed, leave traces patent to all the world. She had come into the room pale, with nervous lines of suspense and dread quivering round her mouth, her eyes unnaturally large and bright, and with the dark hollows of sleeplessness encircling them. But as she saw North Branston's face, all those tokens of pain and agitation faded into insignificance before the ghastly dread that woke slowly in her eyes, and seemed to creep over every feature.

"North! North!"

The two words came from her the merest whisper, a cry wrung from the overstrung nerves, stretched now to a pitch of unendurable tension. North heard it, for his lips twitched slightly, but he did not speak; he only looked at her. The next moment she had come up to him with a wild, rushing movement, and her fingers had closed upon his arm.

"North!" she said, "North! tell me what it is?"

On the instant, as her touch fell on his arm, a sharp shiver shook North Branston. It passed, and he stood motionless.

"Take away your hand," he said. His voice was thick, and his utterance not quite distinct. "Don't touch me! There is an awful atmosphere about us both which holds us separate."

Slowly, very slowly, as though mesmerised by his eyes, Lady Karslake drew back her hand. It was a slight action enough, but it seemed to put an extraordinary distance between them, and it was succeeded by a moment's pause. The pause was broken by Lady Karslake. She spoke slowly, and in a low, vibrating voice.

"Separate?" she said. "You and I! That is not possible!"

A grey shade was stealing even over North Branston's lips.

"Our possible and impossible," he answered, "are empty words. We use them as we will; we give them a significance which we declare to be inalienable and eternal. But the time comes which brings them into contact with that which shrivels them to nothing—the possible and impossible spoken not by us but to us!"

"By whom?" she said steadily; her eyes were flashing.

"By—destiny!"

She clasped and unclasped her hands with a quick movement. "Destiny is an abstract phrase; as to its practical bearing on life we can argue at our leisure. It is no such shadow that we have before us now! Whatever it may be that has come between us, it comes to us through your sister! Her influence has been against us from the first. She has stood between us, poisoning our happiness, jarring our love, since the hour when you told her of our engagement. By what right? That she should stand between us at the last moment, that she should put us asunder when we stood on the very verge of union which nothing could destroy, is the culmination only of the atmosphere which she has brought about us—which I have felt and struggled against and recognised against my will as her creation—during this last horrible fortnight. How does she justify herself? What has she to say?"

She stopped. Gradually, as she spoke, her voice had gathered force and volume, though she had not raised it by a tone. A proud demand for satisfaction, a long-pent-up rebellion. She faced him with her

head raised, her eyes flashing with an antagonism such as seemed to possess her to the total exclusion of any sense either of fear or dread.

For one moment North Branston's eyes rested on her face; rested on it with a lingering, unconscious gaze as if for the last time. It was significant of his sense of the inexorableness of that law of which the working was to crush them both, that he made no attempt to soften by any tenderness that from which he had no power to save her.

He paused a moment only, and then, with every muscle braced and rigid, he spoke in a thin, steady tone.

"I have no sister," he said. "The woman to whom I have given that name is my mother."

Heavily conscious that he must give her time, that to stun her was of no avail, that he could save her nothing, he stopped, watching her face. He saw it whiten to the lips as though her heart had given one horrified leap; he saw it relax into a shocked, bewildered repulsion; he saw it change again; he saw everything fade from it but the look of exquisite pity and tenderness which was for him alone; he knew that her hands were outstretched towards him, and he felt rather than heard her words.

"North! Oh, my poor North!"

Then he spoke again.

"Wait!" he said. "If any human being could take upon himself the endless sequence of results that follow on a deed, I would stop here. That cannot be. Not she alone, not I alone can work out what has waited its development till now. She and I; and you, are linked together by the power which crushes us all three. And the tie that holds us each to each is the tie that holds us to the same man."

His first words—either by the solemnity of hopelessness with which they rang, or by something in his face of which he was unconscious—had arrested her movement towards him. Her hands had sunk slowly by her side. A ghastly creeping fear had risen slowly in her eyes, stilling their tenderness into a helpless, fascinated stare. Her lips moved as though she repeated his last words, but no sound was audible. With a blind sense that the watch, even of his eyes, was all that he could spare her, North Branston turned away.

"The man I mean was once your husband," he said hoarsely. "And I curse the day when he was born, although he was my father!"

The clock was still ticking. He heard that, though there was a roaring in his ears that should have drowned the sound of cannon. There seemed to be no other sound in the room. Then, stilling that roaring on the very instant, there reached his brain the slightest possible rustling, as of a woman's dress. He turned sharply. The slender woman's figure which had heard his words erect and rigid, standing for an instant motionless, as a man does sometimes, wounded to death, was swaying heavily from side to side. With an inarticulate cry he caught her in his arms, and in another instant he was kneeling by her side as she lay upon the sofa. She was conscious still, and he saw it.

"Eve," he cried thickly, and his voice, in the supreme agony of its despairing self-abnegation, was like an inarticulate prayer to that power which he felt but did not know, "Eve, my love! We are in the hands of Fate."

She drew away the hand he held, shivering away from him as she lay prone, her face pressed down upon the cushions. And as though in that slight gesture there was materialised the division that had fallen for ever between them, North Branston rose to his feet, blindly and mechanically, and turned away. The agony that unites is endurable. It is when the power that crushes, isolates; it is when the helpless human creature finds itself alone with the horror of great darkness that has fallen on it, that the heights of humanity's capacity for suffering are reached.

The room was very still; so still that the little tapping sound made by the tassel of the blind, as the September breeze moved it to and fro against the window-ledge, struck out with a hard, echoing noise. The man and woman alone together, and yet so infinitely far apart, had passed beyond the region whence any sound or movement penetrated to the world of sense, as they had passed beyond the region where time is of any account. How long the clutch of realisation held them, whether the moments were many or few, concerned them not at all. It held them still and helpless, and did its work.

There was a long, faint sigh—the expression merely of physical sensation—as of a woman who struggles slowly back to life after long unconsciousness. It touched the silence and died away again. Then Lady Karslake stirred. A slight shiver as of bitter cold ran through her from head to foot. She raised herself and sat up, sup-

porting herself with one hand upon the back of the sofa, gazing straight before her with dull, unseeing eyes, as if mainly conscious for the moment of physical exhaustion. North Branston, standing with his back to her, his head bowed forward on his arms as they rested on the mantelpiece, stirred slightly on the sound of her movement, but he did not lift his head.

"I am not mad? I am not mad?"

The question formed itself on her lips slowly, monotonously, almost indifferently; and she sat quite motionless, all the mobility of her face dead beneath a kind of stupor. As though her voice, so changed, had pierced his very heart, North turned sharply towards her. His quiet gave way, and he broke into a hoarse, despairing cry.

"Eve! Eve! If you could have been spared! If you could have been spared!"

For the first time since the blow had fallen on him, for the first time since he had found himself confronted with the power which had laid his life in ruins, there had risen in him that bitterest of all realisations: the realisation of the impotency of regret, the helplessness of love itself. He let his head fall forward on his arm again with a hopeless, choking groan.

She had turned her face towards him quickly: not moving otherwise, however, but letting her eyes rest upon him. She did not speak, but she put up both her hands and pushed the hair back from her forehead, pressing down her fingers as though to still some pulse that throbbed and beat too painfully.

The stupor of her face was breaking up, was growing thin; and through it, fitfully revealed, there dawned a great and striking change. It was as though, in that dreadful period of stillness, something had come to life in her, dormant until now; something by which her whole nature was vivified, and endowed with forces wholly new to it. The sensitive, impulsive temperament, pushed too far, had touched the limits where the possibilities of rebellion, always latent in such a nature, assert themselves an active force. The nervous, capricious instincts of the wilful woman's heart, too roughly seared, had broken all the bonds that held them and passed into the realms of passion. The lines of her face seemed to grow stronger, forged by the fire that glowed deeper and deeper in her eyes. There was a desperate daring about the set of her lips, and an indescribable suggestion of recklessness now about the defiant pose of her head.

"Why should we not spare ourselves?"

Her voice was not raised, but in its low, distinct tones there was an intensity of feeling which no cry could have touched. She watched him with dilated, feverish eyes, and saw him lift his head suddenly, not turning to her, but looking straight before him. Then she spoke again.

"We stand alone together, you and I," she said, and something seemed to beat and thrill in her voice, held down, forced into abeyance with a power of self-control as strange in her as that which it restrained. "We are the creatures of the present, not of the past! The past did not give us to one another; the past cannot part us. That which binds us to one another cuts us off from all the world beside, from the world of the living and—from the world of the dead."

Her voice, grown hoarse and low, stopped abruptly; and in the breathless silence that followed, North Branston turned slowly and looked at her. His face was seared and drawn, as in the extremity of mortal conflict. His eyes were ghastly; they were the eyes of a man in whom all manhood's instincts have risen into writhing, tumultuous life; have risen to meet in desperate, agonising struggle that which must dominate them or be dominated by them for ever. As she met them, the flame burst through its wrappings once for all, and Lady Karslake sprang to her feet, her head thrown back, one arm outstretched in passionate accentuation of her speech.

"By what right?" she cried, and her voice rang out for the first time full and vibrating. "By what right are we condemned? How are we altered, you and I, the man and the woman whose hearts are to be broken, that that which we held yesterday we must resign to-day? By what fault of our own are we judged? By what deed of our own are we crushed? Why should we take upon ourselves the punishment which we have never earned? There is no law, there is no power, can justify injustice such as that! There is no force can bring us to submission to what is without reason, without right! We love each other! Let us hold to that! We love each other, you and I, isolated individuals, free, unfettered man and woman. Let us stand fast on that, come what come will!"

"It cannot be!"

He stood quite still, facing her, one hand resting heavily on the mantelpiece. All personal sensation seemed to have left him;

nothing in his ashen face seemed to belong to life at all except his eyes, dark and unfathomable. The three words came from him heavy, monotonous, touched with the immutability of the shadow beneath which he stood.

She heard him, and the words seemed to fall on her as an unexpected blow might have done. She threw out her hands instinctively as though to protect herself, and then she paused.

"You don't understand," she said. Her voice was low and quick, and something seemed to grate in her throat. "You don't understand what that means! It means—parting! Don't you see? It means that we shall never see each other again! It is all or nothing! We must ignore everything, we must deny and defy everything, or—Don't you see? Don't you see? North, North!" Her voice rose into a broken cry. "Have we so lightly learned what love may mean that we can throw it by like this? We are not children! Love has come to us unsought, unasked; the solution given to us of the problem of life. We have misunderstood it, jarred it, misused it; but we will not give it up! We cannot! We cannot!"

Drawn instinctively by the agony of her appeal, he had come closer to her; he held her hands in his, held them close against his heart as though he would have given her with its very life-beats, that strength which his self-conquest had brought to him.

"We must!" he said hoarsely. "That which is against us is not to be struggled with, not to be defied! We must submit!"

"Submit!" She had torn herself out of his hands, and she flung the word back at him, throbbing and burning with the wild passion of scorn that blazed in her eyes and knit up every quivering line of her face into a magnificent mark through which despair could not and would not break. "Submit! You may submit, I never will! It is your love that fails! Remember that! Your love? I said that we had learned what love might mean—that was not true! You have not learned! You'll never learn! What has it been from first to last? A travesty, a shadow, a broken reed! When has it stood between me and myself? Never! When has it stood between you and your cares? Never! What wonder that it cannot stand now between us and the shadow that divides us—the shadow you call destiny. Destiny? If you had ever known what love meant, you would

know that there is no destiny higher than love, that love is the one power by which we stand or fall!"

Before the quivering, unreasoning words had died away, touched into a sudden agony of perception which he had never known before, North Branstor's voice took up the word as he faced her with his face convulsed and working like her own.

"It is!" he cried. "It is! And saying that says all. It is my love that stands between us and ourselves. It is my love that strangles in me all that would take from you the sacrifice you offer. It is my love that holds me fast to all that we may hope for now—submission. It is my love that saves us both!"

The air was thick and dark about him, but he saw her hands flung out towards him, whether in repudiation or entreaty he did not know. He caught them in his own and drew her to him, kissing her only once as he might have kissed her dead. He felt her figure relax and lose its tension as he held her, and then he laid her gently down.

A moment later, and from the darkness of the room he had passed into the blacker darkness of the world without.

BIJAPUR.

TWELVE miles of crumbling grass-grown ruins extend over the barren table-lands which border Portuguese territory in Western India, and the hoary domes and minarets, as they rise from the sea-like plain, appear as though painted in a visionary mirage on the blue canopy of the over-arching sky. The forlorn and deserted city enhances the melancholy aspect of the surrounding scenery, but the decaying splendour of the ruined capital indicates the former importance which belonged to the independent Mohammedan kingdom of Bijapur, founded in A.D. 1501 by a brother of Mahomed, the conqueror of Constantinople. The rapid growth of the mushroom metropolis was succeeded by a still more rapid decay, for in A.D. 1686, Aurungzebe, the Great Mogul, besieged Bijapur and put an end to the brief existence of the new monarchy, the work of destruction being completed by the Mahratta invaders who devastated the city with fire and sword. The sparse herbage and stunted thorn-bushes which spring from the unfruitful soil of the Deccan fail even to colour the monotonous grey of the dreary landscape,

and the desolate picture in its mournful frame strikes with chilling effect on eye and mind. Within a few paces of the primitive station stands the Bol Goomas, a moss-grown mosque, surmounted by a gigantic dome, and now fitted up as a Dāk Bungalow, where a turbaned Moham-medan presides over the comforts of the few travellers who turn aside from the beaten track to visit lonely Bijapur. With an irrepressible shiver at the thought of occupying this ghostly shrine, we leave bag and baggage in the echoing cloisters, and obtaining a dilapidated tonga with a still more dilapidated steed, set forth on a journey of exploration. The inhabitants of the city seem apathetic and poverty-stricken, and though a few turbaned sheiks, more or less fanatical, hang about grey tomb and ruined mosque, the scanty population of bullock-drivers, peasants, and idlers, scarcely look up from the broken walls where they lounge in utter indifference to the coming and going of the "Sahib lok." We drive through the deserted streets, amid a scene of general overthrow and ruin, to the great mosque of Ibrahim Roza, surrounded by a green garden and enclosed within lofty walls pierced by richly carved gateways. In the midst of the verdant lawns rises a noble stylobate of grey stone which supports the three wings of the building, separated from each other by an open space containing a broken fountain. The beauty of the mosque consists in a series of graceful domes of aerial lightness and perfect proportion, while the mausoleum, which serves as the *raison d'être* of this poetic sanctuary, combines colossal size and boldness of outline with extreme delicacy of superficial decoration.

A fortified outpost, known as Burg-i-Sharzhah, the "Lion Bastion," and crowned by the famous gun, Maliki Maidan, "Lord of the Plain," the largest piece of ordnance in the world, commands a boundless prospect of the bleak and stony steppes. A keen wind waves the withered bents of the grassy hillock, and stirs the green tendrils of the tangled creepers which strive to veil the yawning mouth of the rusty cannon, large enough to contain the body of a giant. A solitary goat browses on the scanty pasture, and two brown children gaze at us with wondering eyes as they seat themselves on the machicolated walls which formerly defended the richest city of the Western Deccan. Huge blocks of stone and concrete strew the ground, relics of the final siege, which ended in the

complete subjugation of the capital, which was afterwards left, like Babylon of old, to the owls and to the bats, with all her pleasant palaces pillaged and destroyed.

Descending from the breezy height we drive to the Jama Masjid, the Moslem cathedral commenced in A.D. 1557 by Ali Adel Shah, but never completed, though continued by his successors on the same plan in the rare intervals of peace which befell the turbulent kingdom during the succeeding century. Even in its unfinished state, this majestic temple takes a prominent position amidst the Indian mosques of Islam. The beautiful Mehteri Mahal, or "Gate of the Sweeper," rich in traditional associations, and encrusted with delicate carving in transitional Indo-Saracenic style, makes a striking picture with the gloom of the wreathing arches brightened by a group of girls in orange and scarlet saris.

The mosque of "Asar-i-Sherif," "The Illustrious Relic," was built to contain a hair plucked from the beard of the Prophet, and the disproportionate size of the casket to the treasure enclosed, suggests the proverbial hunt for a needle in a haystack as a comparatively trifling task.

A superb verandah supported on richly carved wooden pillars sixty feet in height, forms the principal feature of this enormous edifice, adorned by Persian prayer-carpets of exquisite design and glowing colours. The low chant of a dervish echoes mournfully through the stillness of the shadowy dome, and the leathern wings of a bat flap heavily from the arch of the marble Mihrab which faces Mecca, but the haunted silence of the mighty mosque seems emphasized rather than broken by the weird sounds which steal through the gloom. Legend and song immortalise the palmy days of Bijapur, and surround her ruined mosques and crumbling walls with an unfading wreath of memories. The heroic deeds of the Princess Chand, once Queen Dowager and Regent of the kingdom, are commemorated in the ballads of her native province, where her story still lingers on the lips of the gentle Hindu mother as she rocks the cradle or holds the distaff in the dusky lanes and narrow alleys of the mouldering and melancholy city. The courage and genius of this Royal heroine won the enthusiastic admiration of Akbar, the great Mogul, when his far-reaching ambition claimed possession of the Deccan, and demanded the subjugation of the independent southern kingdoms as tributaries

of the mighty northern empire. Bijapur was at the summit of prosperity when the regency of the Princess Chand expired, and the reins of government fell into the hands of the youthful monarch who then ascended the throne. The Mogul forces pressed continually forward towards the frontiers of the Deccan, and called on the King of Ahmednugger to submit to the imperial invader. The demand was refused, but the unfortunate sovereign was conquered and conveyed as a prisoner to the Court of Delhi, where he died in captivity. His son and successor had fallen in battle, but the Prime Minister of the deceased monarch prepared to oppose the claims of Akbar's son, who was marching to take possession of the vacant crown on behalf of a child of the Royal family.

Having fully prepared the city for a heavy siege, the command of it was given to the Princess Chand by the unanimous voice of Minister and people. Rising to the emergency with the prompt decision of a clear and powerful intellect, the heroic woman by means of letters and ambassadors so effectually roused the interest and co-operation of the neighbouring Princes, that a confederacy was formed on her behalf and every preparation made for sending an army of relief; but the active Moguls pressed forward the siege with unsparing energy, dreading the powerful combination formed against them, and desirous of obtaining a victory before the proposed league was successfully established. The brave Princess, clad in glittering armour, flew from post to post, inspiring her followers with her own courage and devotion, and winning the loyalty of every heart. She superintended the repairing of breaches and the strengthening of forts, cheered the despondent, controlled the rash, and welded together a thousand varying influences by the magnetism of her personality and the flame of her enthusiasm. Finding that the enemy was laying mines for the destruction of the city, she countermined, but an unexpected explosion occurred before the completion of the task, and about eighty feet of wall were thrown into the air, to the dismay of the disheartened garrison. The city would have immediately surrendered but for the noble example of the Princess Chand, who, throwing her veil over her face and calling upon the troops to follow her, leaped with drawn sword upon the yawning breach. Ordering the cannon to be dragged up after her, she directed the fire upon the

besieging army, and when ammunition failed, emptied her treasury of copper, silver, gold, and jewels, to feed the guns. The precious stores so lavishly sacrificed flashed through the smoke of battle, hurled with unremitting fury and deadly aim, until by nightfall the menacing chasm was filled by the dead who lay covered with the gems and precious metals heaped upon them. The Moguls, appalled by the persistency and bravery of the fierce defenders, at length withdrew their troops, and made a conditional peace with the patriots of the south, yielding an unwilling homage to the chivalrous Princess, who was afterwards regarded with the reverential awe which the Oriental pays to a divine incarnation.

The ballad poetry of the Deccan celebrates these deeds of almost Homeric fame, and also bears witness to the tender and loving heart of the southern Queen, by whom the meanness of her subjects was regarded as a sacred charge committed by Allah to her guardian care. The story of her career reaches a climax in the gallant defence which was brought to such a triumphant conclusion, and we search the pages of history in vain for records of her later years. "Happy is the nation which has no history," happier far the woman to whom the same proverb can be applied, and, from the lack of information respecting the future lot of the brave Princess Chand, it is generally assumed that when the necessity for public action was over, she relinquished the command of an army and the cares of official life, for the more congenial pursuits common to her sex. The respect which she won in an age when the strict seclusion of "purdah" was enforced upon the majority of womankind, proves the truth of the maxim enunciated in the great Sanskrit dramas of an earlier and purer epoch, that "the mantle of virtue is the strongest armour of a woman."

As we stroll through the ruined palaces where the departed monarchs of Bijapur reigned through the swiftly-passing years of the brief dynasty which rose with unparalleled splendour and faded like a storm-beaten flower, the tide of time rolls back, and imagination pictures the brilliant life of the provincial Court which once filled these silent halls with pageantry and pomp. The clustering domes of forsaken mosques and crumbling tombs alone remain as witnesses of past glory and forgotten fame, and the dust of ages lies thick upon the pages of the old-world chronicle studied

by the alien race which wrested the sceptres of India from Hindu and Moslem hands. The sunset splendour steals through the broken Saracenic arches, and lies in shafts of golden light on the marble pavement. A cloud of purple doves flutters home to roost in the shadowy niches of the great Gul Gombaz, or Rose Dome, the mausoleum of the seventh King of Bijapur, and the colossal sepulchre reflects the last pink flush of the radiant afterglow on the silvery sphere which is fluted like the crowding petals of an opening rose.

Tinkling goat-bells echo from the darkening plain where a shepherd drives his flock to a distant fold, and the cry of a muezzin rings from the airy height of a slender minaret as he calls the faithful to prayer; but the summons meets with no visible response in this city of ghosts and memories, where faith itself seems dead. Crossing the spacious courts of the ruined Arkilla, or inner fortress, we wend our way through the deepening shadows of the mysterious twilight to the desecrated mosque which "the flat-nosed Frank" now profanes to secular uses. The turbaned khansamah welcomes us with profound salaams, and we follow this degenerate son of the Prophet into the domed and vaulted interior, divided by wooden screens into bed-chambers and kitchens, with an echoing dining-hall beneath the central cupola. A night in a mosque is an unusual experience even amid the varied surroundings of Eastern travel, and it is a relief to hear that Her Majesty's representative, though only a juvenile sub-collector, is expected to take up his quarters in the desecrated sanctuary at a later hour. Our somewhat unfounded apprehensions are at once allayed, for under the official wing of the "Sahib lok" our security is unassailable; and, pending the arrival of the Government officer, we wander through court and cloisters, now bathed in a silver flood of moonlight which transfigures the scene with magical beauty. On the further side of the great stone quadrangle, a mighty tomb surrounded by arched galleries and crowned by a shimmering dome, rises on a marble pediment and dwarfs the neighbouring mosque with the gigantic proportions of its noble architecture. The sculptured doors stand open, and our entrance disturbs a colony of birds from their roosting-place on cornice and capital, from whence they flutter wildly away, wheeling round the dusky heights of the dome with terrified cries. A goat with two kids trotting by her side makes a rush for the open gateway

at the sight of the unaccustomed intruders; but our desire for new experiences is soon satisfied, and we beat a hasty retreat from the haunted spot, said to be the resting-place of some fair Mohammedan Queen.

Many traditions flow from unknown fountains into the great channels of history, and the general character of the legendary lore which belongs to Bijapur implies that a higher position was taken by the women of the province than was usual in an Indian State. The seclusion of the Mohammedan "purdah" has ever proved a less insuperable barrier to mental progress than the iron yoke of Hindu caste, and numerous instances are found in the annals of Oriental nations, where the more intellectual daughters of Islam have freed themselves from the bondage of custom and creed. No doubt exists that even the Aryan Hindus in early ages gave to women their true position. Polygamy was almost unknown, and the following lines quoted from the "Mahabharata," a ponderous Hindu epic of B.C. 500, represent the estimation in which Indian womanhood was then held:

A wife is half the man, his truest friend;
A loving wife is a perpetual spring
Of virtue, pleasure, wealth; a faithful wife
Is his best aid in seeking heavenly bliss.
A sweetly-speaking wife is a companion
In solitude—a father in advice,
A mother in all seasons of distress—
A rest in passing through life's wilderness.

The gradual descent of the moral standard may be traced from the pre-Vedic times during the age of conquest when the Aryans were ever pressing on toward south and west, and man falling farther away from the simplicity of childhood, until Brahminism had riveted the heavy links of the complex theological system on the people of India. The women suffered accordingly, and their complete captivity was consummated by the Mohammedan conquest, when in imitation of Moslem custom, and as a safeguard from the rapacity of the invader, the seclusion of women belonging to the higher classes became universal throughout the Indian peninsula.

The vengeance of the prophet fails to disturb our slumbers in the violated sanctuary of Islam, and through the glow of the roseate dawn we look for the last time upon the domes and minarets of deserted Bijapur. Women with brazen lotahs on their sleek dark heads stand round the broken fountain of the mossy quadrangle; silken-haired sheep follow a shepherd in flowing robes through an arched gateway wreathed with waving

ferns; and a dervish spreads his prayer-carpet on the tessellated pavement, prostrating himself thrice towards Mecca as the sun rises above the distant horizon of the grey and lonely waste. The feeble remains of existence which still linger in Bijapur wake up to consciousness if not to actual life, and the beardless boy who represents the authority of the Imperial Government clatters off in state, with mounted police, and running syces clad in brilliant garb and bearing white wands of office. Our more humble vehicle follows in the wake of the scarlet-lined barouche and prancing Arabs, which dash through an admiring crowd gathered round the ruined gateway, and we bid a long farewell to the sad and sombre memorials of the buried past in the monumental city of the Deccan. Even the advent of the railway has hitherto failed to rouse Bijapur from the long sleep of two hundred years, and although strenuous efforts are being made by Government to clear away the mass of debris from the ruined Arkilla, with a view of utilising the ancient fortress for modern purposes, the herculean task is still unfinished.

THE STORY OF THE LAMP.

FROM the moment when people ceased to observe the regular bedtime of animated nature and began to sit up at nights, there began a new era in human affairs. We don't know much about that Palæolithic man who hunted bears, and rhinoceros, and such small deer, about our primeval forests; certainly not enough to say whether he used lamps or candles, or perforce contented himself with the ruddy glow of the fire, around which he would sit with his family, toasting mammoth marrow, or grilling hyena steaks or other toothsome morsels. Perhaps our primitive man was too fond of fat as an article of diet, to care to waste it in experiments, else he might easily have invented the rush light, so simple and primitive is it, and still made and used in primitive households such as you find now and then among the Welsh hills. A bundle of dried rushes dipped several times in melted mutton fat, there is all the process, and a capital miniature torch is the result, which the most boisterous winds can hardly extinguish. Now something of this kind our primitive man may have known how to make. If he had not arrived at his muttons, the fat of the cave bear or the bison might have served his turn.

Equally primitive is the lamp used by the Esquimaux during the continued night of the Arctic winter, which serves as cooking stove as well, and indeed constitutes the family hearth and the centre of the primitive household. And this is simply a shallow stone vessel along the edge of which is disposed a wick of dry moss. The oil supply is furnished by a lump of blubber which hangs near the flame, and drips till the oil is all extracted.

As simple in principle, though often finely shaped and of excellent design, are the lamps of bronze and clay that have come down to us from antiquity. Underground London is rich in these relics of a buried civilisation, and a varied collection of Roman lamps which have been dug up in excavations about the City may be seen any day at the Guildhall museum. They are all of the same simple nature—although of every possible design—a receptacle for oil, and an aperture through which the wick is passed, the latter formed of a few twisted threads. The only device for increasing the quantity of light was to add to the number of wicks. The best of these lamps can have given but a feeble light, and that wavering and smoky, and infinitely dull and dreary must the long winter nights of our rigid climate have seemed to colonists from sunny Italy.

As for the ever-burning lamps of mediæval romance, lamps that glowed unextinguished for centuries, whether in the heart of Egyptian pyramids, or in the tombs of mighty emperors, kings, or warlocks—as in the tomb of Michael Scott,

That lamp shall burn unquenchably
Until the eternal doom shall be,

these belong to the borderland of the mystic and marvellous; and to the same region belong the magic lamps that are served by demon or genie, such as that of our old friend Aladdin.

For a long series of centuries the lamp seems to fall into disuse, anyhow for domestic purposes. The porter bears a torch to see who is knocking at the castle gate; and about the courtyard doubtless

Full many a torch and cresset glared;

but a dainty taper burnt in my lady's bower, or glimmered in the casement to light the lover to his tryst, where in other days Hero would have lit her classic lamp. The Church encouraged the use of candles, and while chandlers in wax and tallow increased and flourished, the craft of the lamp-maker was almost extinguished. The lamp sur-

vived only in the form of a horn lantern that hung about stable-yards, dimly burning among carriers and hostlers.

As for public lamps, their day was yet to come, and began to dawn soon after that grand flare-up, the burning of Whitehall Palace, which indirectly hastened its appearance. For the Court removing to Kensington, the constant traffic by day and night between London and that dark and remote suburb suggested the establishment of a row of oil lamps along the greater part of the way. And this long festoon of feeble lights impressed the imagination of the period as something wonderfully gay and festive; and the contrast of their own dim streets inspired the citizens with a desire for something equally brilliant. But the story of public lighting has really little to do with the history of the lamp, for no definite improvement resulted from its connection with the public service, and when the oil lamp was finally superseded by the gas flare in the public streets, it was just the feeble, ineffective implement it had always been.

In domestic lighting, for nearly the first half of the present century, candles held almost undisputed sway. Old stagers may yet recall the dimly lighted parlour, the fire burning softly in the twilight, where the elders kept blind man's holiday. The bell is rung and Mary brings in candles, a pair of moulds in tall brass candlesticks brightly polished, with snuffers on a tray, sharp-beaked snuffers of steel, with jaws that opened and shut with a snap, and something sinister in their appearance. There were plated candlesticks and snuffers too for occasions of state, with silver branches that suggested the spoils of Jerusalem. But there was also a lamp, a stately edifice of bronze that towered over the family circle at times, and shed a generous and genial light when so inclined. But what a demon it was to smoke, and to smell! And it would burn, when it condescended to burn at all, nothing but the very finest sperm oil at a fabulous price per gallon.

The Argand burner, with circular wick and central air supply, and a close glass chimney that powerfully increased combustion, was the first great advance upon the primitive oil lamp. But viscid animal and vegetable oils do not rise freely enough to support such increased combustion, when merely drawn upwards by the capillary attraction of the fibres of the wick. A supply of oil must be kept up almost close

to the flame. Here was the crux of the lamp-maker, a difficulty met in many ingenious ways, the most successful of which was the French "Moderator," in which the oil was forced upwards by spring and piston, the machinery being wound up like a clock at frequently recurring periods. France, too, from its broad stretches of yellow-flowered colza, furnished the oil which practically held the field during long years of the middle Victorian period.

With all its faults, and they were many, the old "Moderator" lamp was a pleasant, attractive object, and its cheerful light seemed an emblem of calm domestic peace and modest prosperity. It was pre-eminent in country houses, and shone with gentle radiance in districts far remote from noisy streets and the meretricious glare of gas. It was mild, innocuous, charming. It never blew up; you might upset it, there would be a smash and a mess, but no coroner's inquest to follow. But it is gone, swept away with all its fellows, by the oil of the period, the all-conquering petroleum.

Now the genie of the old oil lamp was of a friendly, pacific nature; it had accompanied the human race in its many changes and wanderings, and had never done it harm. But the spirit of the petroleum lamp—call it by whatever name you please—is of a totally different character. Your lamp is to it a prison from which if it escapes it will spread fire and destruction around. But we can't go back, if we would, to the old harmless method. Petroleum is everywhere the conqueror, and the old models have disappeared. Too old-fashioned for use but not old enough for a museum, they linger for a while in the shop of the marine-store dealer, and finally disappear into the limbo of old rubbish.

In petroleum lamps German invention took the lead. It was a German notion that a broad flat wick could be drawn into a circular burner, and thus all complications avoided. And the simple "Berlin burner," now so cheap, and so universally spread, is a very excellent model, much safer than the ordinary flat burner, and even if upset it rarely causes a conflagration. It is not perfect, however, for the wick is raised unevenly by the pinions, and sometimes the whole machinery sticks fast. The inventor who could devise a simple means of raising and lowering the wick evenly all round, would deserve well of his country and should receive a civic crown.

It is the little common lamp with the flat burner, that is so destructive of human life. Hardly a day passes but some victim to what is called a lamp explosion is carried to the hospitals. On a moderate computation it is found that at least three hundred deaths a year occur in London alone owing to lamp accidents. A very small part of these are due to actual explosions. In the crowded rooms of the poor, with children moving about, the little rickety lamp is easily upset, and as easily the contents catch fire and destroy a little holocaust of victims. Or if the lamp should be neglected like the family in general, perhaps, and dust, dead flies, and congealed oil have collected about the burner, then as it is moved about it catches fire internally, the terrified bearer throws it down, and a conflagration follows. If the lives that are lost singly and unnoticed were lost in one fell catastrophe, all the country would be aroused, and would demand that some means should be taken to protect these poor victims from a painful, agonising death. And invention should surely be able to give us a safety lamp on the same cheap, effective scale as the engines of destruction which are now found in so many homes.

For this has become the "age of lamps." Everywhere they abound—tall, stately affairs rising from the floors of elegantly furnished saloons—shining with subdued radiance behind curtains of silk; resting beside the whirring sewing-machine on the table of the poor sempstress. They crowd the windows of shops devoted to their cult; they go round the world in ships' cabins; they burn underground in mines of gold and diamonds; and wherever civilisation goes they penetrate, and often a good way beyond. As well try to stop the flow of the tide as the progress of petroleum. But we might make it a little safer for our own people. There should be no touch of tragedy in the story of the lamp.

JANET.

A STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

JUST beyond the heart of the City there stands a grey square. Tufts of young grass grow up amongst its quiet stones, and the hand of spring touches into leaf and blossom the trees of its old garden. At one period the élite of the City had lived in this square, but later on fashion ebbed from it and flowed in a great tide westward.

Still there lingered about the high old houses a pathetic air of past grandeur.

They were mostly inhabited by struggling young professional men, or solitary ladies with long pedigrees and limited incomes. But the large middle house in the square was an exception to the rule. It had been converted into a very select Library with all modern accessories; everything arranged in the very best style, and with the most correct taste. This Library was the pet hobby of a company of retired citizens. It had originated with them; they were its parents, so to speak, and under their united wings it had been fostered. They watched over it and tended it with the care of a mother over an only child. It was their delight to make it a thing complete of its kind, to beautify and add to its charms yearly, and above all things to keep it very select. The retired citizens were proud of their Library, and they were boastfully proud of their librarian. He was, indeed, a man of no small renown. The name of Francis Peterkin was as well known in the courts of all learned Universities as amongst the inhabitants of his native city. Albeit, he was a shy, reserved man, carrying his weight of learning very humbly—a man of few words and, like the Apostle Paul, of no great bodily presence. Mr. Peterkin had neither kith nor kin, and lived his life in a world of books, very much, it was said, at the mercy of a house-keeper.

Nevertheless, he was acknowledged to be one of the finest Egyptian scholars in Great Britain, if not in Europe. When savants from foreign capitals visited the City, they never failed to find out the select Library, and to pay their respects to Mr. Peterkin. The Library had quite a rich roll of distinguished names upon its visitors' book. The committee hugged themselves upon the possession of their librarian. As a mere matter of fact, a man of poorer parts might better have filled the post, but, on the other hand, the committee felt assured that no other modern library could boast of a Francis Peterkin, and therefore were they joyfully willing to pay for the honour.

As time passed on, however, it was discovered that Mr. Peterkin, although everything that could be desired in the way of learning, had yet no great interest in the lighter books of fiction. And light books of fiction were in constant demand from the select Library.

To rectify this trifling defect an assistant had been elected, and it was to replace this

assistant—lately called to a larger sphere in London—that the committee held many long and important meetings.

One blustering March afternoon Mr. Paton and Colonel Jefferson were closeted in the handsome business room of the Library. Mr. Paton stood upon the hearthrug, his hands beneath his coat-tails, balancing his portly figure thoughtfully on his heels and toes. The Colonel occupied an arm-chair, the while with a penknife he delicately scraped his faultless finger-nails.

"Of course it's an innovation," said Mr. Paton. "Really, quite now, what one might call an innovation."

"Decidedly so," said the Colonel, closing his knife and returning it to his waistcoat-pocket. Colonel Jefferson had lived in the very best Anglo-Indian society, and spoke in a deep voice, swallowing his words in large military mouthfuls. "What does Peterkin say about it? What does he think of a female librarian?"

The March wind lifted up its voice with a hoot and blew a volume of smoke down the chimney.

"Tut, tut, tut," exclaimed Mr. Paton, frowning and stepping forward a pace. "Now, why are these chimneys allowed to be in that wretched state? Positively, it's a disgrace, it is indeed; I must bring up the matter before the committee.—Peterkin! oh, Peterkin says very little. It's as difficult to know what Peterkin really thinks as—ha! here he is! How d'ye do, Mr. Peterkin? Speak of an angel—you know the rest, my dear sir. We were just discussing this new arrangement."

The librarian came forward, puckering up his short-sighted eyes, and bowing silently, as he shook hands with the two gentlemen.

"You don't—er—positively dislike the idea of a young lady assistant, Mr. Peterkin?"

The librarian walked to the round centre table, and, turning his back upon the representatives of the committee, lifted up a book and examined it.

"Has she passed examinations?" he asked abruptly.

"Examinations! Well, really now," Mr. Paton thoughtfully stroked his chin, "a very pertinent question, my dear sir; so much naturally depends upon examinations—but, really now, upon my word I can scarcely say. You don't know, Colonel, eh?"

"No," said the Colonel shortly.

"No! She's a most intelligent and well-

educated young lady, that I can vouch for—a daughter of one of our late highly esteemed physicians. You knew Dr. Muir? Every one knew Dr. Muir."

Mr. Peterkin silently nodded, with his eyes still fastened upon the book.

"Yes, of course, my dear sir. He died young, that is comparatively young, leaving his widow and family not over well provided for. Too generous, they say, to look after his own interests—a great mistake I call it. Mrs. Muir I have had the pleasure of meeting—a most charming and cultivated woman, and like mother like daughter, you know. The younger one is studying medicine—a fine-looking girl, but rather—well, what all these medical ladies are—rather advanced in views, don't you know—a thing I don't at all approve of. However, Miss Kate is not in the question. The older daughter, Miss Muir, being wishful to do some work, and being so well educated, and—and altogether pleasant—a wee bit of a favourite of mine, I confess—"

Mr. Paton made this statement in parenthesis and looked distinctly coy for an instant, but quickly drew himself together again.

"Well, and that, taken in conjunction with the fact of young Clayton leaving us, made the committee seriously consider the question and finally see their way to offer the post to Miss Muir, if—of course, entirely if, my dear Mr. Peterkin, the step meets with your approval?"

Mr. Paton having talked himself short of breath, paused interrogatively.

The librarian merely lifted another book and held it close to his short-sighted eyes, while the two members of committee eyed him, waiting patiently until he should be moved to speech.

"You wouldn't make the want of examinations a serious drawback?" queried Mr. Paton anxiously.

"I should call it an advantage," said Mr. Peterkin with unusual decision, throwing down his book. "This generation is over-ridden with examinations."

He walked towards the door.

"When would she be able to come?" he asked, with his hand upon it.

"As soon as you like," they answered simultaneously.

"The sooner the better," he said, and with a bow, which was abbreviated by the closing of the door, he went out.

"Well, now, really, I am relieved," exclaimed Mr. Paton, rubbing his hands.

"There's been no fuss or botheration;

Peterkin's taken it quite easily—like an angel, I may say."

"And why shouldn't he?" said the Colonel, getting up and stretching himself.

"Oh, well, you know. Peterkin's Peterkin, and between ourselves"—Mr. Paton lowered his voice confidentially—"he's a bit of a woman-hater, is Peterkin. All these very clever men are, more or less. They don't seem to care much for the fair sex somehow; can't be bothered with them, I suppose."

"Pooh!" said the Colonel irreverently, drawing out his watch. "The creature doesn't exist."

"The which? I beg your pardon, my dear sir."

"The person you referred to; I say he doesn't exist."

The Colonel yawned and walked towards the window.

"Ha, it's fair now; I must be off to my club; have an appointment there at five o'clock."

But long after Colonel Jefferson had left the library, Mr. Paton still possessed the hearthrug, deeply cogitating.

Two days afterwards the new assistant appeared. She was of medium height, looking younger than her twenty-three years by reason of a slight and willowy figure, and with that delicate youthfulness of soul which most often accompanies a fine and sensitive nature. She had shy brown eyes, and a charming mass of ruddy brown hair coiled round her head. There was nothing remarkably striking in her appearance, beyond a certain indefinable maidenliness which better made itself felt than described.

"Not at all gay or flighty," said the committee, smiling approvingly upon one another.

Mr. Peterkin made one of his silent old-fashioned bows when the young assistant was introduced to him, but otherwise scarcely seemed to notice her.

"So like Peterkin," remarked Mr. Paton to himself indulgently, and he felt impelled to say aloud:

"Miss Muir has never filled a like post before, Mr. Peterkin. You will, perhaps, kindly show her by a word, quite by a word, my dear sir, what are—or—in fact, what the duties are."

"I shall try to learn quickly," said the girl, flushing timidly. "I shall wish to do my best."

The librarian lifted a swift glance to her face, and then let his eyes fall.

"Oh, the duties are not heavy," he said, with a melancholy droop in his voice. "I dare say Miss Muir will find them all out for herself."

But this was a thing not so easily done as Mr. Peterkin seemed to think. As Miss Muir walked home in the early dusk of the spring evening, she reflected that the day had been the longest in her life; for the work was entirely novel to the girl, and to ask any directions of Mr. Peterkin demanded from her a mighty moral effort.

The young librarian's home stood in one of those highly respectable dull streets which, like so many arms and legs, stretch out of the heart of the City and run into its growing suburbs. It was a dull house outwardly, but inside there was a delightful atmosphere—the delicious warmth of a real home.

Her family welcomed her return with open arms.

"Tell me a story, Jennie," demanded Hughie, the little lame autocratic brother on the sofa, the moment she entered.

Hughie lived upon as much as might support a small-sized bird, but possessed a voracious appetite for fairy tales.

"Now, Hughie, don't worry. Poor thing, it's tired. It must have tea first," said Kate, who was twenty and a medical student. "Eat, drink, strong-minded woman of the family."

The mother said little, but she smiled upon her daughter very tenderly, and with soft mother's lips kissed her forehead.

"Tired, little Janet?"

The strong-minded woman embraced all her family very joyfully, and sat down with a deep sigh of content.

"How good it is to be home again! Almost worth having been away. Mother, mavourneen, how is the head?"

"Better, dear," she answered cheerfully. "Now don't talk to us until you have eaten something."

"I have been in the Desert of Sahara all day," said Janet gaily, "and home's like a great rock in a weary land. 'In the shadow of this teapot I sit down with much delight.' Oh, it is good!" And she drank three cups of tea.

"Now," cried Hughie, lifting up his little impatient voice. "Now, Jennie, you've had enough. Begin the story now. I like Jennie's stories," he sighed, settling himself back on his pillows in luxurious expectancy.

"But how shall I begin, Hughikins!" she asked, going over beside him and

laying her soft cheek caressingly against his fair head.

"Begin 'once upon a time.' I like that sort of way best."

"But I'm too stupid to-night, Hughie, for 'once upon a time.' You can't think how woolly my head feels! Ask me questions instead."

"What about the librarian?" interposed Kate, who was seated at a side table with a selection of books and bones spread out in front of her. "Dr. Anna Burns knows him. She says he's tremendously clever. Did not you shake in your shoes before him?"

The smile curved Janet's red lips very charmingly.

"I did shake a little, but not—I hope—not very visibly. Mr. Paton was mentally holding me up by the hand and encouraging me."

Kate tilted back her chair and laughed.

"How exactly like Mr. Paton! Aggravating man! I verily believe he would pat an archangel on the head, if he got the chance, and call him 'my dear sir,' or 'my good young friend.' Not that I mean that you are an archangel, my dear, or myself either, for that matter. I never meet him but he says: 'Well, Miss Kate, and how do the medical studies get on?' with a look of intense, disapproving patronage on his satisfied face."

Kate took up two bones and pressed them lovingly against the rich bloom of her cheek.

"No, I'm distinctly not a favourite of Mr. Paton's. He thinks me most unlady-like—a bold, bad person because I study you, dear old bones. And, sad to say, I don't care a button, and I don't care a fig."

"But all the same, he means well," said Janet, smiling eagerly. "He is really quite, quite kind at heart."

Kate gave her shoulders a naughty shrug.

"Oh, Janet, Janet, why will you be so abominably charitable? Why cannot you let a creature abuse another creature in happiness and peace? Well, we shan't discuss our dear, amiable friend. 'Revenons à nos moutons.' What like is the great librarian?"

"Oh, really not very terrible at all; quite a small, harmless man, baldish, and— and short-sighted, I think, because he half closes his eyes—so!" Janet puckered up her pretty eyes in imitation of Mr. Peterkin. "He is rather like a sparrow; a

lonely, quiet sparrow—not a chirping sparrow," she added thoughtfully.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Kate, in interested tones. "Bald, and like a lonely sparrow, is he! You don't say so! Well, well, very clever people always do seem disappointing in the matter of looks. I wonder why that should be!"

"Yes, like a sparrow," continued Janet dreamily, taking up her parable. "But not one that has ever chirped in the spring-time. The miracle of a new heaven and a new earth has never unfolded itself to him. He is like one of the poor little stuffed birds in the Museum. If he ever sang, it must have been in a primeval existence—a prehistoric age. But that is only my very humble opinion," she said, waking up, "and I am liable to err, as every one knows."

"Of course," assented Kate, "being but mortal, more's the pity. Mother, you and I must form no mental portrait of Mr. Peterkin from Janet's words. We must leap to no conclusions."

"But what do you do, Jennie?"

"I find out where all the books live, Hughikins. I am the servant of the books, and when their friends or acquaintances call for them, I say 'at home,' or 'not at home,' as the case may be. It is very splendid to be beside so many books. And they are all well-dressed books, too. I do like books in nice coats. But it's a temptation. One does so wish to sit down and read them all."

"Lucky little doggie!" sighed Kate. "But yield not to temptation, for if you do, it may turn you out of the Library."

"Thanks, Dr. Kate," Janet laughed gaily, and going over to the hearthrug, knelt down beside her mother.

"Mother, she said, her voice falling softly, "do you know, some of our dear old books were there. It almost made me cry to see them again."

"I know, my dear. It was kind and generous of the committee to buy them from us after father—went away."

The mother and daughter sat silent for a little while with clasped hands. Their friendship was of that perfect kind which needs no words.

The firelight flickering up shone upon the two faces, and showed how like they were to one another: the same sweetness of the mouth and eyes, the same refined and gentle expression which yet betokened no weakness, and, pervading all, that rare and youthful hopefulness of soul, which

neither time nor sorrow can ever kill. But the mother's face had deep lines where the daughter's was still fair and smooth. The girl looked into the leaping fire, with eyes that shone through tears.

"It was because they loved father," she said softly. "Every one did. Oh, I am proud—very proud—to be his daughter."

CHAPTER II.

JANET speedily grew into the ways and work of the Library. She had a very real love and reverence for books, therefore the care of them was a pleasure to her. She took delight in it.

The old and the young librarian could not be said to hold much conversation. In the case of Mr. Peterkin the tongue was not an unruly member, and Janet was too shy to break through the wall of silence which environed him. Nevertheless, that intangible feeling which must of necessity grow up between two persons brought much in contact with one another, was not one of unfriendliness.

As the young librarian worked busily on the bright spring mornings over a new catalogue of books, the gentle gaiety of her heart broke out in happy snatches of song, and the fresh lilt of the young voice spread into Mr. Peterkin's room, touching him quaintly in the midst of his learned researches as when one is greeted by the perfume of a forgotten flower in an old volume.

"I hope my singing does not disturb you," she asked of him timidly one morning, standing at his door with a sudden consciousness of crime.

He started from his stooping posture over his desk.

"No—no, Miss Muir, certainly not. Pray continue if you care. I—I do not dislike it."

"Quite truly!" she said, smiling up at him eagerly.

"Quite truly," he repeated, with a flash of answering smile.

Now Mr. Peterkin's smile was a very delightful thing. It illuminated not his face alone, but his whole being, and while it remained, he was, for the time, clothed in a very goodly youth.

But unhappily Mr. Peterkin's smile was, like his speech, but seldom used. It sent Janet back to her cataloguing fearlessly, and with a great surprise that the librarian should look "so altogether nice and human-like."

The committee congratulated themselves heartily on the choice of an assistant librarian.

"So quiet, so ready, with such a keen interest in books, and withal such a perfect lady." Mr. Paton led the chorus of praise. "And then"—but this was in confidence—"her salary, of course, very much less than young Clayton had received; for naturally, being but a woman, she could not expect so much."

"And much better to look at," quoth the Colonel, in his deep voice, "than most of those blue young women."

"Oh, well, well," said Mr. Paton, rather shocked, "beauty and brains do not always go together. For my own part, I consider too much brain a mistake in ladies; encroaching on man's prerogative, don't you know. But beauty of course. 'Tis to woman we give the palm in beauty," he added with great gallantry.

The Colonel only grunted, for Mr. Paton had the criminal faculty of boring his acquaintances very terribly. Many a black-hearted villain had more friends than he.

One morning, Janet, reluctant yet courageous, stood at Mr. Peterkin's door and knocked. When, in answer to his brief "Come in," she entered, she found him standing up, and, with obvious difficulty, drawing on his overcoat.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, with an involuntary grimace of pain. "My enemy is upon me again."

"Let me help you," she cried impulsively, coming forward. "Is it rheumatism?"

"Ay, rheumatism," he answered, with a groan. "Thanks. What I shall do, if it incapacitates me for work, I cannot think."

He spoke with that sudden burst of frankness which besets the most reserved natures at times, looking at her almost appealingly, as if for sympathy. His eyes were wide open, and she observed for the first time that they were of a deep and beautiful grey. The brown and the grey eyes were on a level, and for a moment they met. Then Janet stepped back, and leaning her slight figure against the table, looked at him with a gaze full of grave pity.

"I am very sorry," she said gently. "Father had a powder he recommended for rheumatism, but I cannot remember its name." She ruffled her forehead in perplexed thought. "How stupid of me to forget! I shall ask mother. Have you ever tried a—a sort of powder, Mr. Peterkin?"

"No, but anything your father prescribed I should be pleased to try." He took up his hat, brushing it carefully with his sleeve, and peering into the crown of it for a moment. "He was a most worthy man; I—I had a very high regard for your father, Miss Muir." This he said with a jerk, and, turning from her abruptly, with a hurried bow, left the room.

"But it was nice of him to say that about father," thought Janet, with a warm glow of the heart. "I must remember to ask mother about that powder thing. But, oh, dear," with a start of recollection, "he has gone, and I have forgotten to enquire about Mr. Paton's book."

The life in the Library might have been monotonous, but the constant coming and going of visitors kept it busy and lively. Underlying the gentle seriousness of Janet's nature there was a fine spirit of humour, not known to all, with a power of graphic description, which made her keep Hughie enthralled for hours by stories, real or imaginary, of the different people whom she met.

"But, Jennie, do they see you laughing?" the little fellow asked anxiously.

"Oh, no, my Hughikins. I am only Miss Muir, the assistant librarian; what the dear, fat old ladies call 'a quiet, civil-spoken young person.' They don't know the real creature inside me."

"Does the Sparrow know, Jennie?"

"The Sparrow!" Janet hesitated for an instant. "The Sparrow is very wise, my little boy blue, but he lives most of his days within a cage—a cage with thick bars and locked doors—and it is only at very rare moments that he hops out and we meet—which reminds me, mother, about rheumatism. Mr. Peterkin suffers from rheumatism. Now, what is a cure?"

"The sting of bees," said Kate, beginning to laugh, "is the latest prescription. But if you had had the politeness to consult me, which you have not had, I should tell you candidly there is no cure. However, go your own way; seek advice elsewhere."

"So I shall," returned her sister. "Your advice is too dismal, Dr. Kate! Mother, what was the name of that powder father used to prescribe?"

"Salicyne, my dear; but I scarcely think he considered it a cure, only it helped in some cases."

"I shall tell Mr. Peterkin about it, anyhow; that is, if my little scrap of courage does not forsake me before to-morrow. My Hughikins, you must never

grow very learned, or I shall be too afraid to speak to you."

As days passed by, other visitors came to the Library, but from these Janet greatly recoiled, shrinking even from any mention of their names. Most of the committee had sons—gay, idle young fellows, who were, as a rule, very able and quite willing to spend the money their fathers had made. They had laughed at the Library hobby as a senseless craze of the old fogies, but when the new librarian appeared, they found it necessary to saunter in of an afternoon and to enquire assiduously for books which they had no desire to read. To win the heart of a pretty woman, by wile or guile, was what these young gentlemen considered excellent sport—the more difficult to obtain, the keener the pursuit. And bets had been laid as to how long the pretty librarian could withstand the blandishments of young Jefferson.

In the sheltered life of the girl's home she had been as carefully guarded from insult of word or look as any princess; she feared no evil because she knew none, and she was, at first, too surprised and bewildered to understand what it meant. But when the Colonel's son cast his languishing gaze upon her, or took some desired volume from her with hateful lingering pressure of the hand, her soft cheek burned with an inexpressible feeling of insult and indignation, and she turned from him haughtily, with a fine lift of the maiden head. She loathed his presence, and his attentions were abhorrent to her, but in the high pride of her heart she could not stoop to mention them to any creature. For under heaven there is, in truth, no pride so great as that of a pure-hearted maid.

He had followed her into the inner library one afternoon under pretext of wishing some obsolete French work. As Janet stretched up her hand to the shelf to lift it down, he threw his arm around her waist in rude embrace and attempted to kiss her. In a moment she wrenched herself from his clasp, and with white cheeks and blazing eyes pointed to the door.

"Go!" she said.

"Ah, Miss Muir, don't be so hard on a fellow, now. 'Pon my soul, a pretty girl shouldn't be so cruel."

But she looked at him with the scathing, pitiless scorn of her girl's eyes, and said "Go" again.

Then young Jefferson, having the meagre sufficiency of grace to feel that she was as

completely removed from him as if a guard of seraphs railed her round, with the bravado of a bow slunk from her presence.

Janet sank down on the library steps; she was trembling, but now a deep red stain scorched each cheek. She sat alone. The round-faced clock on the wall beat out the burning moments, heavy with throbbing shame.

In his own private room Mr. Peterkin was seated, critically examining the latest edition on Egyptian mythology. Suddenly he lifted his head and appeared to listen intently. Then he rose and entered the library.

Janet started at the sound of the opening door, but kept her eyes fixed on him with a wide-open, defiant look, all foreign to their soft darkness.

Mr. Peterkin stopped short and hesitated.

"What—what—is it?" he stammered.

"You are ill, Miss Muir?"

"Thanks, no! I am not ill," she replied, in a curiously slow and distinct voice.

Mr. Peterkin walked uncertainly towards the book-shelves and carefully selected a book. Her heart seemed to be beating more loudly than the clock.

"You are alone," he said, holding the book up to his face. "I fancied I heard Colonel Jefferson's voice. I rather wished to consult him about—a—matter."

"It was his son," she said coldly. "He has gone."

"Ah!" He made no further remark, but after a few long moments replaced the book upon its shelf. At the door he spoke again. "If you care to go home now, of course you may. I shall be happy to attend to any one who may come."

Janet lifted her head higher.

"Thank you, you are most kind, but I am perfectly well. There is really no necessity for me to leave."

Mr. Peterkin bowed in silence. His face wore a puzzled, almost dazed expression as he re-entered his room. He took two or three turns up and down the floor, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets. Probably a man looks more markedly youthful in this attitude than in any other, but it was curious to note how absolutely boyish Mr. Peterkin appeared. At the end of one of these turns he came opposite his book, still lying open upon the desk. Catching sight of it, he stopped short, and sighed, for no very obvious reason. It was safe anchorage. A few minutes later on, with his shoulders well hunched up, he

was bending over it, to all appearance thoroughly immersed in the lore of the Egyptians.

But Janet sat motionless for a long time on the library steps, her sensitive soul quivering with its insult. It hurt her more keenly than any physical pain. She felt debased and lowered; she who had held her head so modestly high in the fearlessness of her maidenhood. The hot tears gathered in her eyes and scalded them, but she scorned to let them fall, clenching her slender hand with the effort to drive them back.

Like a veil over the City fell the soft-dropping twilight, and a great white-faced witch of a moon was stepping slowly up the heavens as Janet walked homewards. In the garden of the square there was a delicate, fragrant perfume of young summer. The greening of the trees was breaking into a mist of white and lilac blossom. From out the mystery of their shadow quivered the sudden, sweet note of a solitary bird.

A drunken man, reeling home and clinging as he went to the railings, turned and struck his upbraiding wife a heavy blow.

"You brute!" she shrieked at him with curses.

The blow fell on Janet's heart.

"Oh, heaven! heaven!" she prayed, smiting her hands together.

Little children in the streets were calling to each other, and playing their childhood's immortal games. Janet saw them dirty, and ragged, and forlorn. She could not believe to-night that they were happier than crowned kings.

The lamplighter going on his twinkling rounds; the first faint star pricking out through the thoughtful sky; the rattle of passing carriages; the cheery lights flashing from the shop windows; the housewife with her brown marketing basket; all the many common sights and sounds of life which had formerly touched the girl's quick fancy, now rose up only to sadden her. Deep down at the world's heart she felt the great human sore.

"Tell me a story about a Prince," said Hughie that evening.

"My dear Hughie, there are no Princes. The race is extinct."

"But make them up, Jennie, out of your own head."

"There are no Princes in my head, Hughie."

The boy's lip quivered. He was a gentle, imaginative child, passionately fond of his sister, and, it may have been, spoilt a little

by sickness and the indulgent love of his home.

"You know I like the people that are not real best, Jennie."

Then Janet's heart melted, and she gathered him up in her tender arms.

"My head aches so badly to-night, Hughikins," she whispered. "Wait until to-morrow like a good boy, and I shall tell you two lovely long stories about the most splendid Princes, who are not a bit like real people."

Something in his sister's voice made the little fellow look up puzzled.

"There are real Princes still, although common people don't always see their crowns. You've often said so, Jennie."

"Perhaps it was a mistake, then," she answered sadly. "There was once one, and he was our father, and now he is dead."

"Janet a pessimist!" exclaimed Kate, gathering up her books, "or do my long ears deceive me? My dear, the cloak sits upon you most unbecomingly. Sweetness and light are your dress, leave pessimism to lanky, long-faced students like myself."

Later on in the evening when Hughie had been tucked in his little white bed, the mother came and bent over Janet.

"What's the matter with my own old daughter?" she said caressingly.

"Mother, I ache," said the girl simply. "Oh, mother, mother," she cried, raising herself from Hughie's sofa and holding out her arms. "Love me to-night, mother. Love me as if I were a little child again."

Then her mother, asking no questions, cradled the brown head on her tender bosom and crooned over her soft inarticulate words of love; and Janet grew comforted.

Young Jefferson came no more to the select Library. The game was up. And when his companions went, they found themselves confronted by the silent, spare librarian. Mr. Peterkin gave no sign that he was conscious of what had occurred. He may have had his surmises or he may not. More than any other man I ever knew did Mr. Peterkin possess the wise gift of silence. But, whenever the strident voices and vacant laughter of these young gentlemen were heard approaching the library, the senior librarian's door as certainly swung open and he appeared.

And in the delicate reticence, which yet remained unbroken, Janet's heart drew near and thanked him with a great gratitude too deep for words.

RICHENDA.

By MARGARET MOULE:

Author of "The Thirteenth Brydain," "Catherine Maidment's Burden," "Benefit of Clergy," "The Fleec's Aunt," etc. etc.

CHAPTER IX.

"12, Bryanston Street, June 26.

"DEAREST OLD JACK,—The letter I sent you last night was so short and stupid that I must send you one line to-day to say how sorry I am. I had been out all the afternoon—you know I told you it was my first 'afternoon out'—I went to the New Gallery, and it was hot there and dull, and I got late and hurried back, so you got the benefit, you poor dear boy, of my crossness and tiredness. I was so vexed when I had sent that cross letter to you. For, dear Jack, I didn't mean a word I said when I said I couldn't put up with this life. In the bottom of her naughty heart your Richie is quite, quite content, and really happy in her work. Do remember that and believe it in spite of all I said, won't you, please? I'm getting on all right, too, I am indeed. The children are ducks, all three of them. I think I love Brian best, because he's just a little like what the twins were when they were quite small.

"But I love them all. And I think they're really fond of me. Mrs. Fitzgerald varies, of course; every one does. Still, I think she's satisfied and knows that I do my best to please her. Nothing dreadful has happened to the children since I wrote to you last week. I'm so very thankful! I think as we've gone on smoothly for a nice long time, Mrs. Fitzgerald really trusts me. And that, of course, makes me as happy as happy. Do tell me, when you write on Thursday, a little more about yourself than your last letter did. And do believe, my dearest old boy, that I didn't mean one single word of my note. I'm as happy as I ever can be, till you and I and the others can be together, I am indeed.—Your most loving sister,
"RICHIE."

Richenda read over her letter carefully as she laid down her pen. She was quite alone in the nursery; and when she had finished it, she gave a hasty kiss to the part of the sheet where she had written her brother's name, before she folded it and put it into its envelope.

It was half-past nine in the same evening on which the children had been in their mother's boudoir. They were now, naturally, asleep; Mrs. Fitzgerald would not be in until

late, and Richenda was altogether her own mistress. She had come home from the New Gallery on the previous day feeling wretched, and sore at heart, and resentful. She hardly knew why; she certainly had no definite reason, she told herself, for feeling bitterly hurt by Sir Roderick Graeme. He had behaved perfectly politely and perfectly naturally. Each time she said this to herself, however, it had brought less conviction and more resentment; a resentment that seemed to influence for the time all she had to do with. And when, later in the evening, she had settled down to write her weekly letter to her eldest brother, the note, which was all she had been able to bring herself to write, contained the very last things she would have said to him on any other occasion. She had sent it off without even reading it over; but when it was gone she had so immediately repented of having written it, that her first action that morning had been to get leave to go out to post a second letter at night—a letter she meant to write to cancel the vague unhappiness that the first had contained. It was this letter which now, in her first leisure, she had written.

She fastened the envelope, stamped it, and then went with quick steps into the large room where she slept with the children, to get her things, that she might go to the post with it.

Richenda almost always went to the post herself with her letters if possible. It was easy enough for her to get leave to do this in the evenings, and she enjoyed the opportunity thus obtained of a short escape from her daily surroundings into the cool evening air; and the enjoyment had the added charm of solitariness. She had plenty of fresh air at other times of the day, but she was never alone in it; the children were always with her.

She dressed herself quietly, but neatly and deftly, as she always did, and then, summoning Kate, the nursemaid, to sit in the nursery while she was out, she ran downstairs with the letter in her hand, and let herself out into the street.

It was a lovely summer night; dark, for there was no moon. But the sky was cloudless, and the stars showed clear and countless against its deep blue. There were a few people strolling about; people who were respectable and decorous enough, and had simply escaped from their own closer quarters in the neighbourhood to breathe for a little while the purer air of a wider enclosure, and to enjoy the one short space

of time, in the twenty-four hours of a summer day, in which the streets of London have an atmosphere and a calm which are cool and refreshing to tired brains and limbs.

Richenda took no heed of any of these; she had no eyes for anything but the beauty of the night. The clear tranquillity of the night, and the hush of the air after the hot turmoil that had reigned all through the long day, were very grateful to her; both for their own sakes and because they brought back memories of summer evenings in her own home—evenings that were really only so short a time ago, though they seemed to Richenda to be divided from her by an immeasurable gulf.

Her thoughts had been so engrossed in the past and its associations, from the first moment when she ran down the steps of the house, that she had not heard the house door shut again very softly, a moment after she herself had latched it; neither had she distinguished, among the other scattered footsteps, the sound of a light tread that steadily followed her own at a short distance.

Amelia, the smart parlourmaid, had hated Richenda from the moment when she opened the door for her on the day she was first engaged by Mrs. Fitzgerald. It would be difficult to explain precisely all the reasons for this violent feeling. Of course, its main features were simple enough. The smart, half-educated, but shrewd servant had seen at a glance that Richenda did not belong to the same class as her own, and had seen, too, that in spite of her unassumingly quiet and plain dress, the class that she did belong to was a higher one.

It is quite easy to talk fluently of the breaking down of the barriers of class. It is quite easy to speak glibly of all that humanity has in common as a force powerful enough to bring about that breaking-down. But it will never actually become an accomplished fact. The prejudice in the mind of one set of people against another which has been born to different circumstances is ineradicable, and springs up again and again in spite of all that has been done, and is being done, to crush it. Perhaps, paradoxical as it sounds, it is even stronger for the much vaunted spread of education. At any rate, the fact remains that Amelia, who had been well and even excellently educated, was the more bitter against Richenda and the more jealous of her advantages, because of that fact, than

an ignorant girl would have been. She realised, as the latter never could, that, do what she might, she could never quite acquire Richenda's ways, manners, and habits of thought. And the personal dislike which burnt fiercely enough in her was fanned to flame by the loud consentient voices of the other servants, and by a hearty contempt for Richenda's "airs" as Amelia called them; meaning her privileges of having her meals in the nursery, and also her evident dislike for converse with the rest of the servants' hall.

The final point of Amelia's anger had been reached one evening when she herself, on trying to make out by an inquisitive conversation the details of Richenda's life, had been gently but firmly shown that neither her presence nor her questions were wanted in the nursery. She had withdrawn with an angry founce, and a muttered determination to make the "stuck-up minx" pay for her disdain. And since then her one endeavour had been to find out some defect or mistake in Richenda's conduct by which she might get her into trouble. Her lively imagination had at first decided that the letters Richenda wrote, of which she managed to keep account, must be to a "young man," or several young men. Finding out with much disgust that they were to her brothers, and that that fact alone accounted for their number, she next decided that because Richenda almost always asked leave to post them herself she probably used the pillar-post as a place of assignation with some one.

To night being the second consecutive night on which Richenda had gone to the post, Amelia's excitement could scarcely contain itself, and she looked upon Mrs. Fitzgerald's absence as specially arranged by Fate for allowing her personally to investigate Richenda's doings. So she had watched her out, and only waited for her to get a short start before she stealthily, with a letter of her own in her hand by way of excuse, followed her along the street.

The nearest pillar-box was some little way distant from number twelve. To reach it it was necessary to go all down Brynston Street and to cross a thoroughfare, to reach the corner of a square garden, where it stood, more or less in the shadow of a large tree in the garden.

Amelia had reached the end of the street. She did not intend to cross the thoroughfare, but simply to stay where she was in the convenient shadow of a portico, to watch Richenda while she crossed and posted her

letter. Thence, if nothing at all happened at the pillar, she could come out and follow Richenda home again. So she stood in the shadow and waited. Meanwhile the unconscious Richenda took her way across the thoroughfare rather slowly. She was enjoying the cool air so much that she had no wish to cut the short time she had in it yet shorter.

Just as she began to cross, the figure of a man in evening dress, with a cigarette in his mouth, came sauntering along by the railings that bounded the square garden.

Fergus Kennaway had been dining with some relations in a house on the other side of that square. The relations had dined at seven, and Kennaway had, to use his own expression, been so "deadly bored" during and after that meal, that his feelings had constrained him to take his leave of the house and its inmates at a quarter-past nine.

He was strolling now towards a cab-stand, trying meanwhile to make up his mind how to spend the rest of the evening that remained before a supper engagement he had at half-past eleven. His eyes had been idly scanning for some moments the girlish figure that was approaching the pillar-box from the other side of the way. But when Richenda came into the full light of the lamp at the corner of the pavement surrounding the garden, Kennaway flung away his cigarette with a sudden inarticulate expression of surprise.

"Great Scott!" he said to himself the next moment, "here's something amusing at any rate! I call that a Providence, now, I do indeed."

He quickened his pace and reached his side of the pillar just as Richenda reached hers. Amelia had emerged from the portico shadow, and stood watchful, intent, and alert, on the opposite side of the way. Richenda posted her letter without looking up, the pillar was between her and Kennaway, and she merely saw that some one else was waiting to post a letter, and hurried her own movements.

"Aha, my haughty lady! Luck's on my side at last! Now I've met you without those worrying brats perhaps you'll have a word to spare for me."

At the first tone of his voice Richenda started violently. She turned upon him a face crimson with annoyance.

"Indeed I have not, and never shall have," she said. And then she turned abruptly to cross the road again.

But Fergus Kennaway was not going to lose his opportunity so easily. Two or

three quick steps enabled him to catch her up, and staring coolly into her face he said : "There's no such hurry ! You don't go in until you've shown yourself a little more sociable, and smoothed that haughty frown of yours."

With her lips set till they were almost white, and her whole face very pale, Richenda walked on without a word.

"Have some pity on a fellow, now," began Fergus Kennaway with a change of manner.

They had crossed the road now, and had reached the Bryanston Street pavement. Amelia, with her eyes sparkling, her face aflame with excitement, had slipped back into the shadow of her portico.

"A poor-fellow who is just breaking his heart," he continued, "because you're such an icicle !"

Every muscle in Richenda's face was rigid ; she was walking as fast as her feet would carry her. She looked from side to side for some one to appeal to ; but at the moment it chanced no one was visible save two or three stray young men of much the same calibre as Fergus Kennaway himself. The faster she walked the more easily he quickened his stride. Neither of them was aware of Amelia's soft footsteps coming stealthily behind within earshot.

"Look here, now," he continued, "be reasonable ! What will you take for a kiss ? Would a dozen pair of gloves suit your ladyship, or is there anything else you fancy ? I don't care what it is ! Say what you like—a diamond brooch, if you like—and you shall have it if you'll give me one kiss !"

"Mr. Kennaway !" The words seemed to come from between Richenda's closed lips. "How can you, how dare you insult me so ! You forget yourself entirely ! If you do not go away this instant it will be necessary for me to speak to Mrs. Fitzgerald. I have already thought of asking her protection against your insolence."

"Asking her protection indeed !" sneered Fergus Kennaway. "You are riding the high horse, my pretty maiden ! But you'll have to come down. What I want I'll have, and if you won't give it when I ask for it I'll take it, that's all !"

He slipped his arm round Richenda's waist as he spoke ; Richenda looked wildly round. She was close to the door of number twelve now, but not a soul was in sight save one young man coming saunteringly in the opposite direction. Richenda tore herself away with a little scream. Fergus Kennaway caught her again.

"I will have it !" he said.

He was just drawing her struggling figure closer when the sauntering steps of the young man coming changed into a quick run, and Fergus Kennaway felt a firm hand on his collar.

"Get out of this, you cur !" hissed a voice in his ear.

It was Sir Roderick Graeme.

There was a moment's paralysed silence as the two men and the girl saw each other's faces. Then Richenda's quick breath changed into low, choking sobs. She turned and flew up the two steps. Immediately afterwards the door was opened and she disappeared into the house.

CHAPTER X.

"My dear Brian, if you won't stand still, I can't possibly dress you !"

"He's a dreadful naughty boy, and I'm good, aren't I, nursey darling !"

The words were uttered simultaneously. Richenda was in the nursery getting the children ready for their afternoon walk. Veronica and Dolly, quite dressed, were sitting like models of propriety on two little chairs, while Brian fidgeted incessantly under Richenda's efforts to arrange the collar of his clean sailor suit.

Richenda was feeling very shaken and miserable to day, as her pale face and somewhat sunken eyes amply testified. Her nerves in the first place had been thoroughly upset by the encounter of the night before. In the second, the quality that was strongest of all, perhaps, in Richenda, her self-respect, had received a terrible wound. It was inexpressibly bitter to her to realise that she had been quite unable to defend herself from Fergus Kennaway's insolent advances. And last of all, a feeling which she did not quite understand, or try to understand, was the sorest point of all. It hurt her more than all to think that it was Sir Roderick Graeme who had seen her thus humiliated. She could not bear to think what he must think of her after having found her in such a position. That it was by no means her fault, and that this must have been evident to him, did not comfort Richenda at all. He had seen her, he had found her under circumstances that stung every fibre of womanliness in her into throbbing revolt. And it was worse suffering to her to know this than the circumstances themselves had been.

She had cried long and bitterly in the comparative shelter of her own soft white pillows the night before ; cried until uneasy movements from Veronica's crib made her choke back her sobs, and try instead to

collect her thoughts and resolve what was best to do. She had spent the rest of her wakeful night in trying to make up her mind as to whether she would leave her situation and say nothing, or whether she should appeal to Mrs. Fitzgerald for her help and protection. She had come to no decision, though, when she rose, and no further light had dawned on the question all through the hours of the long hot morning; hours during which even the chatter of the children, falling on her tumultuous resentment, perplexity, and anxiety, had seemed almost more than she could endure. She was conscious now of a slight touch of irritation in the tone in which she had spoken to Brian, and she was steadying her voice to respond to Veronica when the nursery door opened and Amelia inserted her face into the aperture.

"Mrs. Fitzgerald wants to see you in her boudoir at once," she said curtly.

"Wants to see me?" said Richenda in answer, looking up from Brian's suit with some surprise. "Does she know I'm just going out with the children, I wonder? What had I better do, now? I suppose she only wants me for a minute, though. Amelia"—Richenda spoke as she always did, very gently and courteously, to the girl—"would you please mind asking her if Kate shall start with the children, then? They're just ready to go."

Without deigning any answer, Amelia flounced away from the door, to flounce back again breathless in a moment or two.

"Mrs. Fitzgerald says you're to send the children out with Kate. You're to go this minute," was her triumphantly spoken message.

Richenda released Brian with increased surprise. Mrs. Fitzgerald greatly disliked sending the children out under the nursemaid's care as a rule. However, there was no time for her to delay or argue, she must certainly obey, so she summoned the nursemaid, and among a chorus of "Come quick back, nurse, dear, we don't want to go without you—we like it best with you!" she left the nursery.

Outside, on the first landing, much to her surprise, she found Amelia still lingering. If Richenda had been at all suspicious by nature she would have seen in the girl's air and face a longing to be questioned and an overwhelming sense of triumph. But Richenda, in her innocence, never dreamed of connecting Amelia with her summons, much less of asking her any questions. Richenda went rather slowly down the long

narrow staircases, her head ached so, and she felt so tremulous still that it was impossible for her to do anything quickly. She was wondering, too, vaguely and confusedly, whether, the opportunity being thus made for her as it were, it did not come as an indirect answer to her perplexed self-questionings as to whether she should or should not tell Mrs. Fitzgerald her distress, and whether she should accept it as such. She reached the boudoir door, and receiving a sharply spoken permission, entered. Mrs. Fitzgerald was seated by the shaded window in a chair facing the door.

"Amelia said you wished to speak to me?" Richenda said simply. She lifted, as she spoke, her eyes to Mrs. Fitzgerald's face, and then for the first time an entirely new thought flashed across her mind. She felt sick and cold all at once, and she held to the handle of the door for support. She knew that what Mrs. Fitzgerald had to say concerned the scene of the evening before.

Mrs. Fitzgerald's face was dark with passion. It was often angry, but it had never, since Richenda's knowledge of it, looked as it now looked.

"Wished to speak to you!" she said, in a voice that was choked with fury. "Naturally I wish to speak to you! I wish for some explanation of the disgraceful scene that took place last night. I engaged you on the understanding that you were a girl of decent bringing up—and——"

She was interrupted. Richenda's voice was so far away and so set that she herself scarcely knew it for her own, and she stood rigidly upright.

"Stop!" she said. "I will not hear a word against my bringing up. You will have the goodness to make your accusation definite. Whatever it may be, I ask to hear it."

Mrs. Fitzgerald stared through the dimness of the shaded room at Richenda. Something in the girl's ringing, steady tones had thrown a cold dash of water on the flames of her anger. It changed to a smothered sullenness as she went on.

"I've heard all about your behaviour last night. I know every detail of it—every detail of the disgraceful way in which you had arranged to meet Mr. Kennaway at the post, and the absolutely shameless encouragement you gave him as you walked back. My informant saw it all! She even saw his arm round your waist. Now what have you to say?"

"Simply that I think you have made a mistake. It is Mr. Fergus Kennaway whom you ought to interview and not me. Your

informant could have told you that if he or she had the faintest regard for truth."

Richenda had taken her hand from the door handle and now stood absolutely upright, with both hands clasped and hanging down in front of her, and her face set in every line and nearly as white as her white dress. There was something curiously convincing about that rigid little white figure, and the steady utterance that came from it. For a moment as she looked at it Mrs. Fitzgerald's convictions were a little shaken, though her anger was not altered.

"My informant was reliable," she said. "And, besides," she added, her voice becoming the more tremulous with passion as she felt her ground less certain, "I know for myself that this is not the first time such a thing has happened. Last night's occurrence was only the latest of a series of meetings between you and Mr. Fergus Kennaway. He has constantly met you when you have been out with the children."

"To my indescribable annoyance," put in Richenda.

"These meetings," went on Mrs. Fitzgerald, taking not the slightest notice of the interruption, "can only have been arranged by yourself. Mr. Kennaway is not the sort of man to pursue without encouragement a young woman in your position in life. And that encouragement he has of course received!"

"Encouragement!" Over Richenda's pale face came a sudden flush, and her great shining eyes flashed. "Mrs. Fitzgerald, I have listened to what you have to say. Will you let me now tell you my story?"

Mr. Fergus Kennaway occasioned me annoyance on the very first day I entered your house. He has pursued me constantly since then. I have done all I possibly could to show him my feelings. I have given him every discouragement that a girl can give to a man for whom she feels nothing but contempt. My meeting with him last night was purely accidental, and he used the opportunity to put a crowning insult to all his other insults. When you sent for me, I was making up my mind to tell you this, and to ask your assistance and your protection against him for the future."

As she spoke, the flush on Richenda's cheeks had deepened until it became a crimson glow. Her eyes were still more brilliant now with anger, and her hands were clasp and unclasp in excited agitation.

Mrs. Fitzgerald laughed scornfully.

"I don't think you need either assistance or protection," she said. "If you think you do, you have certainly looked for them in the wrong quarter! I cannot assist or protect girls who can do neither for themselves! And I will not keep in my service a young woman who is so incapable of managing her own affairs—to say the very least of it—for I still believe, and shall believe, that the whole entanglement is your own work."

"You do not believe my word, then?"

Richenda's voice was steady no longer; it was trembling almost uncontrollably with anger that would not be repressed.

"You will leave my service this day month!" was all the answer she received. "You may go!"

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PRISONERS OF SILENCE.

By MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

Author of "A Palliant Ignorance," "A Mere Cypher,"
"Cross Currents," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

UTTER devastation. 'The breaking-up of all that had been; the blighting of all that which was to come. The total withering—as before the hot poisonous wind, blown up from a waste place of the earth, all healthful and beautiful vegetation withers—of all the hopes, the happiness, the peace of those who lay through no fault of their own within the sphere of the malignant influence risen from the past. In the midst of all this desolation, the woman through whom all those bound to her were doomed; the woman whose concealed sin had pushed its roots so far that its plucking up was as the shaking of the solid earth; the woman upon whom the band of retribution had fallen once and for all, sat callous, sullen, indifferent to all but the brooding, consuming passion of her own boundless rebellion.

Five-and-thirty years before, the girl from whom this woman was developed, ill-taught, undisciplined, had left her home deliberately, knowing full well for what position she was leaving it. Love had played but a small part in the sordid little drama. She had been flattered by the attentions of a man belonging to a class above her, and a coarse fibre ingrain in her nature had responded to his advances. But with that first indulgence of her passions that fibre had changed its character. Vice ceased to attract her. The life which lay before her became abhorrent to her practical sense. And all the strength of her nature tended towards that dominance which is compatible

to a middle-class mind with respectability alone. Hard and clear-sighted in her youth as in her age, she had encouraged the separation always contemplated by her child's father. She had put the past behind her and trodden it under foot. Entirely devoid of imagination, she had reasoned out a fabrication of falsehood so simple and so definite that her life had seemed to rear itself thereupon as on a rock of truth. She had created a past for herself, as she had said to North Branston, and she created a future. She was essentially the type of woman of whom autocrats are made. She met Dr. Vallotson and took possession of her dominion.

And now it was all over. The long dominance and success of her life, the social prestige of a country town, the domestic supremacy of a middle-class household, were lost to her for ever. She stood confessed the mother of a nameless son; a woman fallen, disgraced, covered with ignominy.

Mrs. Vallotson made no attempt of any kind to deal with the ruin she had dealt about her.

A heavy curtain had descended between herself and the world, shutting in all that force of character, fostered and moulded by thirty years' dominion, shutting out all on which that force had spent itself. The coarse unyielding power thus deprived of outlet concentrated itself within, and all the strength which had forestalled for all these years the moment of defeat arrayed itself in fierce defiance of that greater power, which had held that moment in reserve to bid it strike upon the clock of fate at last. There are natures to which the very fact that they are conquered is its own worst punishment. Such a nature was Mrs. Vallotson's. She was defeated;

the ground was cut from under her feet; that which her will had been set to keep was wrested from her in her own despite, and every fibre of her being was alive with the impotent fury of her resentment. No sense of shame, no sense of remorse was possible to her. She was defeated. A sullen intensity of scorn and rage and hatred possessed her, to the exclusion of any other thought or feeling.

Wrapped in the thick darkness of her self-created isolation, her figure loomed through the events of the week that followed, the centre on which all their tragedies turned. The ghastly readjustment of life which is the inevitable consequence of all convulsion had to go on; the terrible details had to be faced, the pitiful arrangements had to be thought out, had to be put into words; and between that stony figure and the little world which it had blighted, bearing the brunt of the work that must be done as he bore the brunt of the blow that had fallen, stood North Branston.

It is not an uncommon thing for a weak man wronged to harden; it is not an uncommon thing for a selfish man, outraged, to turn upon the outrager with that vindictive bitterness of repudiation or condemnation which outraged charity never knows. But Dr. Vallotson's attitude, as the first wave of comprehension and realisation receded from him, gave to the week that followed its final shade of darkness in the rigid mercilessness of its personal resentment. All his most marked characteristics, characteristics kept in solution, held within the most trivial lines by the placid circumstances of his life, his self-sufficiency, his self-conceit, his love of ease, seemed to be solidified in the crisis in which he found himself into one burning sense of insult. His wife's word had been his law for five-and-twenty years; and in proportion to his submission was the bitterness of his renunciation of her and the implacability of his anger. That she was as dead to him henceforward, that his house was her home no longer, was the foregone conclusion on which all his denunciation turned.

That her claims as a wife were annulled for ever was the foregone conclusion also on which all North Branston's acts and words turned. With the tremendous knowledge that had risen to overthrow his life, all that which had its birth in ignorance had passed into oblivion; the antagonism which had poisoned his relations with the

woman who had thwarted him in the past, had ceased to exist for him towards the woman who had crushed him in the present. She was his mother. The bond between them, against which he had struggled all his life, had suddenly acquired for him a meaning deep and mysterious. She was his mother, and they stood alone together in the world. Her home henceforth must be with him. Her protector henceforth must be himself.

He made his preparations for the altered life that lay before him, with a stern depth of composure that hung about him like a solemn emanation of that dark shadow in which he walked. To Lady Kar-lake's nearest male relation he sent a brief explanation of the stoppage of the marriage ceremony, and he received an acknowledgement in which sympathy and personal feeling were somewhat stiffly blended, and relaxing into a statement to the effect that Lady Karlake was going abroad as soon as she could travel. The breaking off of the wedding had been public. The cause of it, or such a garbled version of the cause as commended itself to the taste of the people who made a nine days' wonder of it, was necessarily common property; and North Branston in his altered circumstances was no longer available for that social position which was essential for Dr. Slade-Fenton's partner. It was by North himself that the first steps were taken towards the dissolution of that partnership; those first steps which Dr. Slade-Fenton, in spite of the clamours of his wife and of Miss Kenderdine, in spite of his own practical sense of their necessity, was loth to hurry on. The house which was to have been Lady Karlake's home was put into the hands of a house agent; and another was taken by North in a quiet district out of the radius of fashionable life and within easy reach of the hospital, within the walls of which his professional work was to be concentrated.

Nothing that lay before him to be done was evaded by North; he neglected nothing; he spared himself nothing. It was through the agency of Archdeacon French, rather than on any impulse of his own, that any meeting between himself and Dr. Vallotson was delayed until all the arrangements for the future were practically completed. Archdeacon French's friendship and countenance was the one steady support that had never failed North through those days. The fact that it was from his lips that Dr. Vallotson had learned the truth gave to Archdeacon a position which enabled, and

indeed compelled, him to stand, in the first stress and shock, between the husband and son. Dr. Vallotson's earliest impulses had taken shape in a violent assertion of his intention of never seeing again either his wife or her son; and the earliest stages of the communication necessary between the man who transferred and the man who took up responsibilities, were conducted through the Archdeacon. But that the meeting should take place at last was one of those necessities, subtle and hard to fathom, which force their way insidiously and gradually into a man's inner consciousness, and must perforce be met. The final severance could only be accomplished face to face.

On the subject of Constance, not one word had been uttered either by or to North. The blow that must be dealt her lay not with him to deal but with her father; and during the first few days she entered not at all into his overlaid thoughts. But, perhaps by force of the silence that rested about her, she gradually assumed for him the position of a factor in the situation; and a factor from whom something was to be expected. The realisation that she was, as he was himself, the child of the woman whose harvest of tares they were all reaping began to press home to his consciousness, and he wondered heavily what action she would take. Side by side with this consideration there dawned in him, as the days went by, a sense of some faint stir, some undercurrent of expectancy which seemed to touch the sullen, immovable taciturnity of Mrs. Vallotson's demeanour. She never spoke of it. It was grimly significant of her attitude towards him that all the passions that raged within her entrenched themselves in his presence behind a barrier of frozen silence.

But it was no surprise to him, it was almost a relief, when two brief sentences broke from her at last, fiercely and reluctantly, as though against her will.

"Who is it that keeps Constance from me? I want to see her!"

It had scarcely needed the words to bring North Branstons face to face with the necessity for speech on the subject with Constance's father.

The September sun was still hot, the September sky was as bright as it had been when North Branstons passed from beneath its light into the shadow of the church, when the morning came which was to see the final winding up of the grinding period of transition in the meeting between

Dr. Vallotson and North. It was the wish of both men that Archdeacon French should be present at the interview, which was to take place at Dr. Vallotson's hotel; and about eleven o'clock in the morning the Archdeacon entered North Branstons's rooms.

The greater part of North's own goods had already been removed to the house of which he was to take personal possession on the following day. The sitting-room had a bare, dismantled aspect. North was sitting at a table, drawn into the centre of the room, writing. He met his expected visitor with a word of welcome.

There was a quiet commonplace comment or two from Archdeacon French as to the progress of North's packing, and the appearance of the room, answered in the same style. Then North said briefly:

"Shall we go?"

And a few moments later the two emerged into the street in silence.

They pursued their way along the busy streets, and that silence remained unbroken. But though he did not speak, Archdeacon French's thought was concentrated on the composed figure by whom he was walking in such silent fellowship. The suffering that makes no complaint; that lays no claim to pity; that stands aloof, even unconsciously, from the sympathy that cannot probe its depths; is of all the most terrible to witness.

He roused himself with a sigh as they reached their destination, and glanced at North. The younger man signed gravely to him to lead the way. Archdeacon French passed on up the stairs; he paused before a door, knocked, and opened it.

Shrunk, tremulous, speechless with agitation, the figure which drew itself with such a pitiful assumption of dignity out of the half-collapsed position into which it had sunk in its easy-chair, looked like the merest shadow of the pompous, excited, offended little man who had burst into North Branstons's sitting-room a few days before. Dr. Vallotson's portly little figure had fallen away, and his clothes hung loosely upon it; his cheeks, their colouring replaced by an ashen pallor, hung flabbily; and there was a loose-lipped misery of bitterness about his mouth which was indescribably pitiable. He did not seem to see Archdeacon French. He looked past him at the figure entering behind him, and for the moment it seemed as though his agitation would choke him.

Then, with a violent effort, the effort of an almost pathetic pride, he mastered

himself. He looked away from North to Archdeacon French, holding out to the latter a hand that shook pitifully.

"Very good of you to come," he said in a low voice. "Very considerate."

He wrung the elder man's hand, and then he turned again to North Branston. There was something about his manner, agitated, shaken with offended majesty, which seemed to set the position between them—half unconsciously, half involuntarily—as between the outraged and one of the parties to the outrage.

"I believe," he said, "I believe that the sense of the necessity for this—this painful interview—is mutual!"

North bent his head gravely with a gesture that tacitly accepted the position assigned to him. As his eyes fell first upon the poor little man, a painful spasm had passed across his face, leaving it as pitiful as it was, once more, steady and controlled.

"It seems, as you say, sir, a necessity," he replied.

There was a moment's pause. Archdeacon French, with a delicate sense of the requirements and non-requirements of the situation, had drawn a little apart. North, with deliberate respect, yielded to Dr. Vallotson the right to dominate the interview, and waited in silence. Dr. Vallotson, his breath coming painfully, his face twitching nervously, was struggling with his agitation.

"We—we need not prolong it!" he said at last, with a kind of trembling stiffness. "A few words will suffice. I have no desire to enter into my feelings—I may say, indeed, that I am quite unable to do so."

His voice seemed to catch in his throat and choke him, and he stopped abruptly. Then, evidently annoyed with himself for the exhibition of weakness, he went on:

"With regard to my intentions, however, there must be no misunderstanding. This meeting is intended to obviate any such possibility."

"Quite so."

"I should prefer, if possible, to mention no names," continued Dr. Vallotson. "You will understand to whom I refer when I say that my decision with regard to that person, already conveyed to you, is final. I am not to be approached on the subject at any future time."

"The understanding on that point is perfectly clear. All future responsibility devolves on me."

The deep, quiet voice, the unflinching manner, seemed for the first time to arrest

Dr. Vallotson's self-centred attention. He hesitated and looked at North.

"I should have been willing," he said, "I believe you are aware that I should have been willing to provide——"

North stopped him, quietly but instantly.

"All future responsibility devolves on me," he repeated; and the accent on the first word seemed to close the question for ever.

"So—so I have understood," said Dr. Vallotson falteringly.

He glanced round instinctively, and as though somewhat at a loss, to where Archdeacon French stood. But the Archdeacon, though he met the uncertain, miserable glance, made no attempt to interfere; and there was another painful pause. It was broken this time by North.

"There is one point," he said, "and only one, I think, on which a further understanding is necessary. No allusion has as yet been made, in arranging for the future, to Constance."

"To Constance?"

The words had come from Constance's father in a kind of gasp of outraged amazement; and at the same moment Archdeacon French stirred slightly. North's words came as a surprise to him also. Then Dr. Vallotson spoke with tremulous loftiness.

"I fail to see," he said, "in what connection any allusion to my daughter is necessary."

North did not answer immediately, and when at last he spoke, the gentleness of his voice seemed to show that he had paused so to choose his words as to render that which he had to say as little painful as might be.

"She is her mother's daughter also," he said. "Can those rights be wholly forfeited? Can those obligations be wholly cancelled? Are the two not to meet again?"

"With my good will, sir, never!" returned Dr. Vallotson, with vehement agitation. "There are offences before which all rights are forfeited—all rights, let me tell you—and fraud and deception are not the least of these. If the exercise of my authority were necessary it would be exerted, it would be enforced to the uttermost, to prevent any further intercourse between my daughter and the person of whom you speak. But it is as well that you should know that it is not necessary. My daughter feels on the subject as I do, sir! As I do!"

An abrupt exclamation broke from North Branston. Something of agitation touched him for the first time.

"Constance!" he said. "A mere girl! Is it possible that she repudiates her mother?"

"It is not only possible," returned Dr. Vallotson pompously, "it is the fact. My daughter's feelings on the subject are too painful a matter for discussion. I must beg you to consider the subject closed."

A moment of fierce struggle betrayed itself in North's face; then the stillness of acceptance fell on it again.

"There is nothing more to be said, then," he said.

"May we consider the interview at an end?" said Dr. Vallotson majestically. He glanced again towards Archdeacon French as he spoke, and this time the Archdeacon, his face sad and troubled, drew nearer in response to the look.

The interview was at an end; the time had come when the paths of the two men were to part for ever; but, with the moment actually upon them, neither moved. They stood confronting one another for an instant in silence. Then, with a slight, grave inclination of his head, North Branston turned away.

But as he moved, Dr. Vallotson took two hurried, trembling steps towards him, and stretched out his hand.

"Good-bye, my boy," he said brokenly. "Heaven help us both! Heaven help us both!"

North Branston caught the hand held out to him and wrung it close.

"Good-bye, sir," he said hoarsely. "Good-bye!"

And so they parted.

A NIGHT ON HELVELLYN.

It is strange that our dear Lake District mountains have so long kept themselves free from the fetters set by civilised man upon the mountains of other lands. You cannot go up Sea Fell by a rack and pinion or a funicular railway. You may not hope to sleep at ease on a spring mattress on Skiddaw's cone-shaped top. Nor are there any yawning domestics who, during the summer season, pass broken nights on the edge of Helvellyn's Red Tarn precipice, engaged in the thankless task of arousing reluctant tourists at three o'clock in the morning and mouthing the stereotyped phrase, "Your boots, sir—and the sunrise."

To be sure, there is Snowdon and its hotel. But that desecration of the sublime has been derided enough.

These thoughts swung to my mind as my oars swung in their rowlocks. It was Sunday evening, mid-July; Windermere was, for a marvel, as smooth in its upper reach as where its green islet-groups keep it always tolerably tranquil; the music of church bells stole to me across the bright water; the perfume of cut hay came in the wake of the bells; the nearer mountains, from Wansfell to Ill Bell and Fairfield, were clear as they had not been of late, and the more distant heights of Conistone, Bow Fell, and the Langdale Pikes looked innocent of storm-raising intentions. A sweet, peaceful, poetic kind of evening!

I could have had no fairer promise for a night on the mountains. The low clouds against the blue were transparent and white, and there was no wind. In an hour and a half I had rowed the seven miles and left my boat at Ambleside. It was an agreeable change to see this tourist metropolis in its Sunday calm. No yelling beer-soaked trippers, fresh from the blackness of Wigan and Warrington, with their Paisley-shawled womenfolk, and the revolting young men, who wear their hats on one side, ogle Westmoreland's simple maidens, and cast impolite adjectives thickly across the daisied meadows and honey-suckled hedgerows at the purple mountains. No processions to-day of laden brakes and horses lashed full speed up hill and down; the trippers eager for their dinner in Grasmere's vale, and the drivers bent on getting back to the waterside as soon as possible, for the next steamer freight of excursionists. One is loth to cavil at the pleasures of the toiling multitude. But there is such a thing as sacrilege. To me, at least, it seems as heinous an offence to go howling and drunk into the most glorious of Nature's recesses as to go howling and drunk to church. As for the effect of such conduct upon the villagers of these lovely valleys—that is past praying for. The sensible tradesman even years back did not think the lot of townsfolk an enviable one. Nowadays he may be excused if he holds his head higher than ever, and treats the tripper with less regard than he shows to his dog.

They were singing with great heartiness at the Baptist Chapel on the Keswick Road when I passed it for Grasmere. What ugly buildings some of these Lake District places of worship are! And how admirable they are withal in their plainness, thus

encompassed by the hills! One of Ambleside's greatest mistakes is its church, which was meant to be one of its most excellent and seducing features. When Nature and Art meet, they fight, and one must conquer the other. Else it is like a household in which first the husband and then the wife holds supremacy. Happily there can be no question here as to Nature's ability to hold her own against civilisation's counter graces.

The sermon was ending in Rydal Church when I came to its porch and stared shyly at its garish east window. I had meant to treat myself to the sermon, being inevitably late for all else. But even while I was crossing the threshold the congregation rose and the collection began. They sang "Sun of my soul." I stayed outside. Who was I that I should obtrude my benefactions upon a people with whom I had come so tardily to worship? I looked at the fox-gloves and cut hay in the churchyard, at the trees in Squire Fleming's delightful demesne, and towards the house where Wordsworth spent so many serene and happy years. The sunshine was waning. The sky over Loughrigg Fell had taken a tint of marigold. It threw into relief a trio of rustics perched royally on a crag four hundred feet above the church. I hope, too, it mellowed the hearts and affections of the various loving couples whom anon I beheld strolling on the farther shore of Rydal's reedy mere. Were I young again, I would nowhere like better to renew the sweet ordeal of courtship. The quarry scar on the south-west side of the lake was in this light a pale blue patch amid the radiant summer greenery of the bracken.

I quite expected to find Wordsworth's seat by the lake fully occupied. Instead of that, congenial solitude reigned over it. Once again I clambered to the top of it: now, as always, nearly slipping over its pigmy precipice. A fortnight previously I had passed here in the glaring noontide of a weekday, and a strange sight I had seen. A worthy amateur photographer with a wife and eight children was, to the best of his ability, arranging his human possessions about the sacred rock. The lady was enthroned uppermost, with her two youngest borns holding her by the hand. The other children were facing the problem of the proper management of their legs. From the road, papa clamoured his instructions. A coach and some brakes came by, but were not allowed to interfere—nor was their

laughter—with the enthusiast's infatuation. And so I too left the place, with the rock, for once, cheated of my homage. If I could, I would buy a copy of that photograph and give it a Chamber of Horrors all to itself. But I fancy eight restive children—not to mention a wife—would prove too much even for a fanatic father.

The fair evening light was yet fairer when I came to the Nab Cottage, with its many memories. A servant girl and a swain were at the wicket on the roadside letting upon the lake, but I did not pay them the compliment—possibly undesired—of noticing them. I bethought myself rather of De Quincey; his five thousand books, "collected gradually since my eighteenth year;" his room "seventeen feet by twelve, and not more than seven and a half feet high;" his Epicurean relish of the tea he here drank so much of; and, chief of all, his adventure with the bilious-skinned Malay whom he addressed in Homer's Greek, and to whom he hospitably gave opium "enough to kill three dragoons and their horses." De Quincey would have added distinction even to that little group of gravestones in Grasmere's churchyard. One can hardly forgive him for not having died and been buried among the mountains.

The golden glow of sunset was over Dunmail Raise when I touched Grasmere's shore. There were voices on the oily, gnat-haunted lake, and the scent of the mown grass was almost strong enough to stupefy. I met a number of people strolling in the sweet atmosphere, between the hours of church and bedtime: white-haired ladies, straight-backed as athletes, being remarkably in the majority. As I passed them I caught snatches of their conversation. It was only to be expected that they should be concerned with the beauty of the fading day. Such words as "exquisite" and "lovely" drifted from them upon the dewy air. The fiery and crimson wisps of cloud vapour over Helm Crag seemed to gleam the more majestically for the laudations they excited. Never had Grasmere looked so ensnaring, and never was it in greater need of the cooling attentions of a zephyr.

From that time on, however, every quarter of an hour brought relief, so that when I was on the watershed of the Raise—with Skiddaw in front cameoed against the still lurid sky—the air was fresh enough for the beginning of winter. This was at nine-fifteen p.m., with the "Nag's Head" of Wythburn two miles away. That

hour from Grasmere to the Raise was the solemnity of them all. I had the land to myself when I had distanced the last of the loving couples. The voices of waterfalls and the radiance of the heavens were company enough for me. Even we Britons have our ecstasies. They may be phlegmatic ones and brief; but they strike deep at the time. Between Grasmere and Wythburn on this Sunday evening I would have forgiven any man anything.

A couple of frantic cyclists dashed down the Raise by the hospital with its wind-blown screen of larches. An old man stood up against the twilight, and told the girl who was with him that he would not for his back's sake descend the hill with her. The girl nodded, and left him. He must have belonged to the hospital, unless indeed he was a belated wraith of the Cymric King Dunmail's ancient army, masquerading as a nineteenth century septuagenarian. An early bat skimmed from the watery turquoise of the sky by the southern shoulder of Steel Fell into the dusky gold of the western heavens. The Raise beck shone in its pools betwixt one rocky flight and another.

And so, at length, with Thirlmere's silver length before me in the gloom—though the word is too harsh for verity—I reached Wythburn's inn a little before ten o'clock. They are not easily astonished by tourists' freaks at the "Nag's Head," and my plan, whispered in the ear of the landlady, was received sedately. I might tarry indoors till the hour that pleased me and then just steal forth into the night—and the moon's light, if so it pleased heaven—leaving the parlour door on the latch. True, tramps exist on this high road from Windermere to Keswick. But the chance of their being afoot, and having the temerity to try the hotel door in the darkness, was not worth discussing.

Beef and pickles and stout at half-past ten o'clock at night may seem a meal for a mastodon. I care not. They suited me and my programme. There were three men of Manchester in the room while I ate, preparing for a leisurely and orthodox ascent of Helvellyn on the morrow. To them my scheme seemed advanced madness. They talked of town's business, assessments and road-mending, while they smoked cigars and drank—milk, of all things. I pricked up my ears when they nailed their administrative tongues to the Thirlmere question. They conjectured that, in the magnitude of its rates as proprietor of the lake it has

turned into a cistern, Manchester must free the inhabitants of the valley from all local taxation. I hope it may be so. The miles of brand new walls and railings, and the officious water-towers and masonry aids to the mouths of scores of mountain becks—that these may fall unwastefully into the lake—form one huge offensive brag of civilisation against Nature. "See what a long fat purse I have got!" Manchester seems to cry in each yard of its Thirlmere works. It is to this same opulent yet not ungenerous city that Wythburn owes its new church bell—of steel—and its bell-tower. The mountain echoes ought to murmur "Many Thanks" for that bell every seventh day. But the old tin pot tinkle of the old bell would have suited them better.

At eleven o'clock my Manchester friends took up their candles and bade me "Good night." They did not envy me my prospect. "You must," said one of them—the most intelligent—"have the eyes of a cat."

The night had fallen dark and the moon showed not. Helvellyn's slope outside was a black shape, little else.

My cigar, the visitors' book, and the increasing stillness kept me company for another hour. I lay on my back on the sofa, and periodically lifted the blind in search of Madame Luna. Ere this I had laughed often over the "Nag's Head" visitors' record. Now I found myself gaping over it. And yet there was enough and to spare of fresh humour in it. I read for example how, only a week previously, "The Reverend and Mrs. —" enjoyed the most delicious tea when they came down [the mountain], and a comfortable rest during a terrific thunderstorm."

That same thunderstorm had left its mark on my mind too; for I was on Windermere in the thick of it, and the word "drenched" conveys but a weak idea of my condition after it. Then there was the tourist who found the weather splendid, but had "no time to see anything," and came down Helvellyn in thirty minutes. Another traveller tells how he "did not ascend Helvellyn and is proud of it," followed in the book by yet another "who did and is ditto." The ribald rhymester was of course also to the front. Here is one of his couplets:

I drank gallons of water away up the Fell,
And fourteen cups of tea at this splendid hotel.

A Frenchman in two lines congratulates himself in true Gallic mode on being privileged thus to enter "Nature's most secret recesses." And so on.

The coolness at midnight was emphatic as the silence. I itched to be off. But still the moon kept aloof behind the mountain's southern shoulder. A series of yawns had to be met and fought. They all but conquered. Wherefore, in a terror lest the weakness of the flesh should prevail over the mind's determination, at a quarter to one I uprose and lifted the latch. The babble of the mountain's waterfalls instantly cried "Come! come!" in many tender keys. The night was dark, with hardly one dim star to help me. I crossed the road, dropped my penny in the money-box for the school children, and struck up the wet bracken slope behind the school, urged onwards by a fond sense of mystery and expectation.

There was no wind, and the air was warmer outside than indoors. As an adventure the enterprise opened feebly. But there were impressions abroad such as the strict votary of methodical existence can never taste. I felt like a man groping over a new world. The sombre shapes of the mountains were about me, and Thirlmere gleamed pallidly in the valley. I was soon well above the lake, and saw how blackly the reflection of the Armboth Fells cleft it in twain. Now and then a sheep or a lamb shot off at a tangent from before me—a white score in the darkness. Now and then a wakeful bird twittered somewhat petulantly. And now and then, having strayed from the track, I trod deep into a bog. If it was a foolish business, what does it signify? I enjoyed myself and that sufficed.

The moon was a base deceiver from the outset. The faintest of glows came but rarely from the clouds behind which she hung, minding her own affairs. As an illuminant she was not in it with a penny dip in a lantern. To her and to nothing else I owed it, in fact, that when I had been on the mountain an hour and had lost Thirlmere's guiding beam, I came in slight—yet sufficient—peril of slipping into a ravine. This provoked reflection. Worse things might happen. The night was singularly genial. Why should I not wait for the first glance of the dawn? And so I lay on the heather and rocks, and, pipe in mouth, stared at the strange heavens and the exalted lines of the mountain tops showing shadowily across Wythburn's glen.

I never passed a more placid and contented hour. Winged agreeable thoughts travelled through my mind. The music of the gills serenaded me unceasingly. It

seemed absurd to suppose that this was a world of metropolises, gin palaces, pawnshops, clubs, and hansom cabs. No trace of humanity or man's work was to be seen, heard, or felt, except such as I chose to discern in myself. It seemed to me I was on the high road to Nirvana, and that the Buddhists beat us hollow in their subtle appreciation of life's possibilities.

But this state of luxurious subjectivity could not last. I suddenly realised that the grey dawnlight had stolen upon the earth. The reign of the material had begun again. The heather within reach of my hand now declared itself as an agglomerate of twigs, each apart from the other. And the steep slope above me cast off its veil of romance and appeared nothing more than a steep slope.

It was half-past two. By three o'clock I was at the junction of the tracks which climb the mountain from Grasmere and Wythburn respectively. I had wandered much to the north, but it did not matter. The track was deplorably plain and suggestive of multifarious traffic. I could see it before me like a high road to the very cairn on the summit. But I preferred to notice it as little as possible. Better far to see was the distant breaking into life of the Dumfries-shire mountains, with the pearly Solway Firth at their bases, and the staid forms of Cumberland's western hills in one close knot. And best of all I rejoiced in the misty line of fire which Nature had drawn in the east through a dense barrier of coal-black cloud with one majestic sweep. Beneath it the mountains of the Pennine Range were visible; nearer, the landscape slowly opened out into green fields and woods uncertain whether to take their colouring from the murky clouds or the sunrise glory. Yet nearer, Ullswater's dull steely surface showed between the Fells like a huge blade of metal bent at right angles; and nearest of all were Red Tarn at my feet, chilly to behold, and the famous edges of Swirrel and Striding, each bold and jagged, and far from inviting at so early an hour.

From three-fifteen to four a.m. I paced Helvellyn's summit, watching the changes and waiting to hail the sun. There was a hissing fitful wind. It blew hither and thither the abandoned sandwich-papers of recent tourists, and defied the roofless Shelter to resist its searchingness. The crimson broadened, but not much. The sun came not. Only in the mountains and the waters was the progress of the day perceptible.

The latter gradually put off their nocturnal shadows, and the former put on those excellent mantles of purple of various hues such as Nature keeps in her wardrobe exclusively for mountains. The Solway Firth shone like a plaque of silver. Great Gable's head seemed anxious to attract notice above his fellows, and Skiddaw vied with Blencathara in the clearness of his vast outline.

There was no sun. It was too bad. Even the mere suggestions of him were faint, and they could in no wise combat the keenness of the wind. Several times I withdrew to the Shelter, and, sensibly red as to the nose, thrust my hands as deep into my pockets as they would go. A stale banana skin once stood on end in a gust, like a charmed snake, as if to jeer at me for my folly. There was other such rubbish: sucked oranges, morsels of rejected meat, corks and bits of bottles. It was little better than the precincts of a restaurant; only that the restaurant would have had a roof to its walls, and perhaps a fire smoking inside it and hot coffee on the hob. Certainly for building purposes an easier mountain-top than Helvellyn's cannot be found in the United Kingdom. And as a site to be braced on, it is at least as good as Snowdon.

Shortly before four o'clock I had the beginning of a fright. I fancied I saw the form of a woman approaching from the south—divided skirts, alpenstock and all; a lone woman too. But it was no such thing in reality; only a thick-fleeced sheep and a mountain line in freakish conjunction. Of course there need be nothing alarming about a woman on sea level, even at so early an hour. But on Helvellyn's top, girt about with romantic inspirations and as a fellow sufferer in disappointment, the visitation was like to have been a dangerous one. Moreover, she also, like myself, may have been bent on descending Striding Edge, bathed in the gold of the sun's earliest rays.

I take shame to myself for my churlishness. This would however, I hope, have fled in a moment had it been actually as well as imaginatively tested. On the other hand, the lady might have felt as annoyed with me for representing the monster man where she had looked to find naught but thrilling solitude as I on a first impulse with the prospect of her intrusion. One scratch, and the natural underlying the conventional in us is disclosed. A second scratch, and the ingrained habits of civilisation show even more plainly than the veneer of Nature

worship with which some of us love periodically to endure themselves in contempt of civilisation.

At length I took to my heels and ran to the declivity whence Striding Edge springs with so fine an affectation of the formidable. The cold was too nipping for anything. Besides, the wind might strengthen, and the Edge is not pleasant in aught resembling a gale. For a moment I stopped to read the inscription on Mr. Rawnsley's memorial stone to that much-lamented young man, Charles Gough. "Beneath this spot were found, in 1805, the remains of Charles Gough, killed by a fall from the rocks. His dog was still guarding the skeleton." As a matter of fact, the stone is to the glory of the faithful dog, but Gough shares in it.

Was it wise, I wonder, to set up this funeral tablet just here where one begins to tackle Striding Edge's difficulties! It is all very well to affirm that the Edge is as safe as Oxford Street, and that no one need come to harm on it. It is not by any means so safe as Oxford Street, and for my part I am astonished more necks have not been broken on it. There are tourists enough who braggartly take all their tasks at a canter. For such persons Striding Edge is a menace. It is also a real danger to many a nervous person, whether the day be stormy or calm. For these last, the tombstone, set up in 1890, cannot be very exhilarating, even as in itself it is far from decorative.

There is another of them farther down—in rather a nasty place too. It commemorates a gentleman killed here in 1858, "when following the Patterdale Fox Hounds." I should think that fox got safely home, if, indeed, he and all the hounds did not crash to their death in Nethermost Cove to the south or on Red Tarn's brink to the north.

No; those tombstones were better away. Nature absorbs too many of her children before their time to make it worth while thus memorialising a few isolated instances of her hardness of heart. Nor does one like to think of our gladsome mountain-tops being turned eventually into sepulchral avenues.

Once down the Edge, which never assumed the garb of crimson and gold that was its due, I ran most of the way to Patterdale, with feet soaked by the dew on the bracken. Until this day I had no idea rabbits were such early risers. The fell-side was dotted with them, old and young,

the sober and the frolicsome. The human dwellers in the valley were also astir. The blue smoke from farmsteads and cottages told of them. But the greatest prodigy of all I had yet to see. It was barely five a.m. when I entered Patterdale village and beheld a white-faced old woman in a cap, sitting in her rose-clad porch and knitting. We tendered each other respectful salutations. But I could have blushed when I realised the sham I was, compared to this worthy creature. She, doubtless, winter and summer, is up with the dawn; whereas I—but no matter. When I had gone half a mile farther, I was near turning back to ask at what hour she went to bed.

I have nothing more to say about my nocturnal visit to the mighty Helvellyn. Had the sun been kindly, perhaps it would have been different. The experience satisfied me, and that is enough.

From Patterdale I walked direct to Ambleside by Kirkstone Pass's toilsome road, drank a goblet of morning milk, and took to my boat. Having rowed the seven miles that separated me from my bournie, I was at home by ten o'clock.

As a mere feat of locomotion, the thirty-eight or forty miles in seventeen hours cannot take rank. But I am not a record breaker.

OLD SCANDINAVIAN MYTHS.

IN the Scandinavian Mythologies as embodied in the Eddas there are many bright and beautiful myths which should be familiar to every Englishman who has any pride in his race, and in those peoples from whom he has descended.

In this system there were several gods and goddesses, the most important of whom were Odin, Thor, Tyr, Balder, Heimdal, Loki, Vidar, Frigga, Freya, Saga, and Syn.

Odin was the chief of the Gods, the Leader of the Wild Huntsmen and of the Raging Host, the Arbitrer of Battles, the Giver of Victory, the God of Nature, the Storm-God, and the Ruler of all Things. Thor, the Defender of Asgard, and the Destroyer of the Giants, was second to Odin only; Tyr was the Sword-God; Balder, the Sun-God; Heimdal, the Guardian of the Rainbow-Bridge Bifröst, had ears keen enough to hear the wool grow on the backs of the sheep; Loki, the Instigator of Evil, afterwards expelled from Asgard and bound in a cave where a horrible serpent dropped venom on his face;

Vidar, the Silent, the son and final avenger of Odin.

Frigga was the wife of Odin, the Queen of Heaven; she ruled with him over the fate of mortals, and dwelt in a magnificent palace called Fensalir. Freya was worshipped as the Goddess of Beauty and Love, and she shared with Odin the heroes slain in battle. Saga, Goddess of History, and Syn, the keeper of the door of the great hall, were less important and less frequently worshipped.

The universe was roughly divided into three distinct abodes—Asgard, the home of the Gods; Midgard, the Earth; and Helheim, the abode of Death.

Midgard was encircled by a vast ocean on the cold desolate further shores of which was the abode of the Giants and Monsters, Jötunheim. Beneath the earth, dwelling in caves and caverns, were the Dwarfs and Elves of Gloom.

Helheim was ruled by Hela, the offspring of the evil Loki; hither came all who died from sickness or old age, or without their swords in their hands. All who died in battle ascended to Valhalla, where they lived in enjoyment until the Fenris Wolf should attack the Gods, when under their guidance they would fight for their defence.

Of monsters and prodigies there was no lack. The dread Fenris Wolf; the terrible Midgard Serpent, whose bulk encircled the earth; the dog Garm, who was bound in a cavern in Helheim; and others the like, played their part in this strange cosmogony. But there were also beneficent and kindly spirits who helped both Gods and men. Such were the Elves of Light; the Valkyries who incited the warriors to mighty deeds, and conducted the bravest of the slain to the joys of Valhalla; and the Norns or Fates who dispensed good destinies.

A prominent and notable myth is that of the ash Yggdrasil. Its branches spread over the universe, and it had three roots; one reached to Midgard, one to Jötunheim, and one to Helheim. This last one was continually gnawed by the dragon Nidhög. It was evergreen, for it was sprinkled daily by the Norns with water from a sacred fount, and its highest branches were over Asgard itself. Under it the Gods sat in judgement and assembled every day in council. Under the root which is over Jötunheim is Mimir's well in which lies hidden all wisdom. For a draught of its priceless waters Odin sacrificed one of his eyes. Upon its topmost boughs is an eagle who knows all that is to be known, and

on his forehead between his eyes a hawk is perched. Four stags and the goat Heidrun, that supplied the heroes with mead, browse upon its buds, and a squirrel was ever running up and down the ash seeking to cause strife between the eagle and the dragon. But in spite of all, the tree flourished as it was sure to do until Ragnarök should come, when all things should pass away. Carlyle, in his "Heroes and Hero-Worship," thus alludes to this myth: "It (Yggdrasil) is the Tree of Existence. . . . Its boughs with their buddings and disleafings—events, things suffered, things done, catastrophes—stretch through all lands and all times. Is not every leaf of it a biography, every fibre there an act or word? Its boughs are the Histories of Nations. The rustle of it is the noise of Human Existence, onwards from of old. . . . It is the past, the present, and the future; what was done, what is doing, what will be done? . . . I find no similitude so true as this of a Tree Beautiful; altogether beautiful and great."

And then consider the sublime imagery in all that relates to the final conflict, the Ragnarök, the Twilight of the Gods, when they, and man, and the universe pass away to the newer life beyond. The strength of the foes, the fierceness of the fray, the valour of the Gods and heroes, the death of all things. "But not final death"—to quote Carlyle once more—"there is to be a new Heaven and a new Earth; a higher supreme God, and Justice to reign among men. Curious: this law of mutation, which is also a law written in man's inmost thought, had been deciphered by these old earnest thinkers in their rude style; and how, though all dies, and even gods die, yet all death is but a phoenix fire-death, and new birth into the Greater and the Better."

Such is a brief skeleton outline of this tremendous, awe-inspiring mythology. Let those who love strength, beauty, poetry, bravery, virtue, justice, continue the study and fill in upon the outline for themselves.

It is customary in an article such as this to point out the origin and development of these glorious old myths, to explain them all away as fantastic dreams of seer and poet; but let us not do that. Let this sublime mythology be to us a living, breathing world, peopled with living, brave men, and watchful, beneficent, kindly deities who guard the interests and preserve the happiness and welfare of those who put their trust in them.

We Englishmen sadly need a little Romance to be thrown into our lives.

Here it is at hand; let us take it, for it is ours; ours more than others; a goodly inheritance from those great Northern peoples from whom our race is sprung, and whose blood and courage still run in our veins to-day.

JANET.

A STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS. CHAPTER III.

THE City was possessed of a distinctly loyal spirit, and held the birthday of its sovereign as a high and holy day. The committee, being Conservative to a man, was likewise loyal, and gave orders that the Library should be closed. Accordingly the librarians were free to enjoy a holiday.

"Let us do something nice on the Queen's birthday," said Janet, addressing her family. "Something quite really and unmistakeably nice."

"What, for instance?" asked Kate, stretching up her arms lazily behind her shapely head. "Suggest something bad and mad. A kind of 'going to sea in a sieve' thing would suit me. I do have such cravings towards thorough-paced badness at times."

"Let us go to sea in a cab instead," said Janet, laughing. "A cab is more comfortable than a sieve, Kate; and let us spend a whole, long day in the real country."

Kate gave an expressive whistle.

"My dear," expostulated the mother, "it would be rather expensive, wouldn't it?"

"Now, mother, do not say that. Do not let us think of expense for once. Let us imagine there is no such thing as money."

"Pretty easily done, Miss Muir," interposed Kate, in grim parenthesis.

"It will be my present to you all. You completely forget how rich I am now. Quite a woman of means."

Janet threw up her head with a pretty air of dignity.

"An open cab," cried Hughie, clapping his hands. "How jolly!"

"And a real live horse with four legs and a tail," added Kate. "My dear Janet, I fear I shall not know how to behave under the circumstances. 'Tis so long since I graced a respectable vehicle of any description other than an omnibus."

"We shall only insist you do not give way to oranges, or dangle your feet outside," returned Janet gaily. "Never fear, big Kate, the ways of luxury are easily learned. Mother, dear, it's settled, then, and I shall fly out this moment to make my arrangements."

Mrs. Muir was a wise woman. If her thoughts turned to past days, when cabs were taken as a matter of course, and luxuries accepted as necessities, she showed nothing of these thoughts in her face.

"Very well, my dear," she answered brightly. "Your present is very generous, and we shall only say 'thank you kindly.' It will be a great pleasure to us all."

"And let us pray it may not rain," said Kate devoutly; "for to my certain knowledge I have never yet known a Queen's birthday that it did not pour."

But this year was a notable exception. The sun shone out bravely, with the brilliancy of a day in July; the sky was of a blue so intense, one's gaze was lost in its depth. A charming young fresh wind blew from the west, swinging the hearts of humanity far up on the high hills of Hope.

"It is perfect," remarked Kate. "I have not a single wee fault to find with the weather. Janet, I hope, with all humility, you can say the same of me. How do I appear to you? Not too proud—not visibly too elated?"

"Your behaviour is everything we could desire," replied Janet, with gravity.

She herself was looking radiant. The gentle, generous soul of the girl shone out of the brown eyes. The wind ruffled the ruddy brown hair and kissed the sweetness of her cheek, as if, lucky thing, he enjoyed doing it.

All the happy world seemed bent on pleasuring that good May morning. As they left the stony streets of the City behind them, and drove out into the hawthorn and lilac-scented roads, they passed many family parties taking their way into the country.

They had a hundred innocent jests and jokes by the way, with fond allusions to their father and happy childish days, and the mother smiled serenely with them all. She had learnt that most rare and difficult lesson of a perfect sympathy; a sympathy which can as generously rejoice with the glad as it sorrows with the sad.

"Well," exclaimed Kate, breaking off abruptly in the middle of a laugh, "I am glad I have my profession, otherwise I might have taken to that."

She nodded scornfully towards a pair of unconscious lovers, walking hand in hand with an artless display of affection.

"Speak reverently of that, Kate," said her mother. "It is a sacred thing."

"But it is ridiculous, mother," cried the girl warmly. "There is too much made of it. All the novels and all the poetry centre

round it. As if life swung on the pivot of love! Mother, it is not true."

"Is it not, Kate? Wait till you come to my age, and then you shall tell me. Your profession is a grand thing, a noble work; I sympathise with it thoroughly; but meanwhile, my child, we shall not scoff at love."

Janet sat silent, looking absently before her; love had been offered to her more than once in her lifetime, but love had never really touched her. Her own unspoken, maiden ideals she had, and those she kept untarnished, and fast locked up in her heart. She turned away her face hastily from Kate's open, laughing gaze, for, in that unaccountable and undesired way in which thoughts often come to us, rose up before her the image of young Jefferson. It was a recollection which, even in the still darkness of night, had power to scourge her cheek with shame; yet like healing balm there came, always with it the more strongly, the remembrance of Mr. Peterkin's silent kindness, and the one grew up and overshadowed the other.

"All the same," retorted Kate, good-humoured but mutinous, "if ever you see me so far forget myself as to behave like that," with an expressive glance towards the lovers, "I give Janet free leave to put an end to me at once."

"What's Kate talking about? I don't understand," said Hughie.

"It's only nonsense, Hughikins, utter nonsense."

A few miles out of the City there stands a hill; like a long white serpent, a white road curls round the base of it, and at the beginning of this road the carriage stopped. In a green sheltered nook Janet spread rugs upon the ground, and Kate carried Hughie in her strong young arms, and laid him tenderly down. The hill was covered with a glorious patchwork of gold and green. Little birds were singing overhead, and in a subtle undertone accompaniment came the distant hum of the City.

"Oh, how good it is to be alive!" sighed Janet, with deep content, throwing herself on the grass. "That golden broom always seems to me embodied joy."

"Very much too prickly," objected Kate, diving into the luncheon basket. "I don't approve of joy of that kind."

"Mother," said Janet dreamily, and then she paused.

The amorous west wind was walking delicately through the trees and grasses,

stirring them with soft murmurous sighings and whisperings.

"Mother, of joy and sorrow, I wonder which is the deeper and the greater?"

The mother mused a little while, and from out the sadness which at times lay like a veil upon her face, a light broke.

"Joy is the greater and the stronger," she answered, "for joy is heaven-like. But it may be the road to joy lies by the path we call sorrow."

"I am mundane," exclaimed Kate, "horribly, disgracefully mundane; I blush for myself. But oh, friends, I am so terribly hungry!"

"I wish I had some of that yellow flower Jennie calls 'Joy,'" said Hughie wistfully.

"And so you shall have it, dear," said his sister, kissing him with a swift dimness in her pretty eyes. "Wait for me five minutes, Kate, till I fetch some broom for Hughie."

She sprang to her feet, and ran lightly up the hill to where a bush flamed in the sunshine. Holding her hat in her hand she paused, and looked around her with glad, shining eyes.

A bird sat on a branch of golden furze and sang as if his little throat would break with joy. There was a pleasant drone and whirr of happy insects in the air.

"They are all singing their *Te Deum*," said the girl to herself, "and so am I, although I have no words to say."

Then she turned to the broom.

"Ah, but Joy is very hard to pluck; I wish I had a knife," she said ruefully, half aloud, as she wrestled with its prickly stalks.

"Might I offer my services, Miss Muir?"

Janet started back with a cry of astonishment to see Mr. Peterkin standing beside her.

"Where did you come from? I did not see you!" she cried breathlessly, the red colour sweeping up her face in a charming wave.

"I have not fallen from the clouds," he returned, with his sudden smile. "But the turf is soft, and doubtless you did not hear me approaching. You wish some of this shrub, Miss Muir?"

"It is for my little brother," she explained, recovering herself and nodding down to the hollow; "we are all here keeping Queen's Holiday—mother, Kate, Hughie."

"Indeed!"

He proceeded in silent, businesslike way to cut branches of the yellow broom, and Janet stole a shy glance at him. There was something odd and unfamiliar about his appearance. Mr. Peterkin was in the habit of wearing a tall hat, which had seemed to Janet to fit on to him, and be as much a part of his being as the hair of his head. But to-day he appeared altogether different in a soft felt one of curious conical shape.

"Like a sugar-loaf," she said to herself, and looked away quickly, her lips twitching with a nervous inclination to smile, for which she indignantly hated herself.

"It smells quite like honey, does it not?" she said hastily, pricking her face in the broom. "Thank you very much indeed. Please stop cutting now, I have quite enough."

She took the flowers from his hands, reiterating her thanks, but he still lingered beside her in silence.

"We are all down there," Janet repeated again in embarrassment. "You—of course—you wouldn't care to come?"

"If I do not intrude," he said, looking at her humbly.

"But no—not at all—certainly not. We—we shall be delighted," she murmured in incoherent surprise, and led the way down the hill.

"Now, who in the wide world is Janet bringing with her?" muttered Kate, leaning on her elbow. "She went off professedly in pursuit of joy, but methinks it is an emblem of woe she brings back. From off which bush has she plucked him?"

"Hush, Kate," said her mother warningly, "I rather think this must be the librarian."

She rose to greet Mr. Peterkin with gentle courtesy, with that tact—finest gift in woman—that has power to set the shyest and most awkward at his ease.

In a few minutes Mr. Peterkin found himself seated upon the grass talking, ay, and even laughing in a fashion that profoundly amazed himself.

Janet, sitting shyly apart, stringing daisy chains for Hughie, and nervously conscious of the anxiety most of us feel on introducing a new friend to our family, had her misgivings soon set at rest.

"But it's just like mother," she acknowledged to herself with generous admiration. "She always does know how to make people happy. I wish I knew her secret."

"Is he the Sparrow?" asked Hughie in quite an audible voice.

"Oh dear, no, 'tis a lark singing up in the sky," replied Janet, blushing deeply, but with admirable presence of mind.

She frowned Hughie into silence, and immediately followed up the frown with a smile and a kiss, lest his feelings should be hurt, for Janet could not bear to wound any one's feelings.

Mr. Peterkin not only talked, but upon invitation, after an old-fashioned apology for intrusion, joined in the feast. He flattered Kate not a little by laughing at her saucy, girlish jests, and even ventured upon one himself with the touching diffidence of a man stepping on unaccustomed ground.

"But he's charming," cried Kate enthusiastically, after he had left. "Yes, in spite of the hat, which is, of course, funny, but after all a mere bagatelle. She broke off gaily in a fit of infectious mirth. "Janet, why did you never tell us how nice your Sparrow really is?"

"Perhaps because I did not know myself. Perhaps— Mother, it was all your doing. You made him talk."

"And how he laughed," put in Kate, "just as if he were a real boy; and ate up the tarts, too! One could scarcely imagine such a learned man liking tarts. He was shy, though," she continued ruminatively. "When I said, 'Will you have a tart, Mr. Peterkin?' his hand quite shook when he took one. 'A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind.' I felt at home with him directly—not at all as one does with some people—all priggish, and perked up, and unnatural. But you"—she turned upon her sister with ruthless candour—"what still spirit possessed you? You were as dumb as a fish."

"Was I?" said Janet humbly. "I—I did not mean to be dumb."

"Oh, no, I dare say not. Well, I really don't think it mattered much. Mr. Peterkin did not notice. I should not think he was a very observant man." Kate fell into a fit of meditation. "After all," she broke out again, "I do believe clever people—really clever people, mind you, not dressed-up daws—are the very simplest at heart and the most easily pleased."

"Have you only found that out now, Kate?" said her mother, smiling.

Mr. Peterkin was meanwhile walking home in the fragrant delight of the May afternoon. The glamour of the May sunshine was in his heart. But, as he walked further from the hill and came nearer the City, a kind of intangible sadness

crept upon him. He observed that most of the human beings whom he met walked in pairs. He alone went solitary.

When he reached the City the sun had gone, leaving its streets grey and cold. The kindly young west wind had departed with the sun, and his treacherous brother blew up from the east with a sharp two-edged sword in his mouth. Mr. Peterkin shivered as he took out his latchkey; and with heavy, lagging steps entered his house. It was cold and empty, for his housekeeper, being possessed of a like loyal spirit as her superiors, had gone out to solemnise the birthday of her Queen. He sat down by the window. The east wind rose out of the sea, wrapping the City in his grey breath, and a great mist of loneliness swept up over Mr. Peterkin's soul. Far off and very faintly he thought he could discern the top of the hill. All the sunshine of life lay in that green bowl at the foot of it.

The eternal child which lives in most of us, untouched by the number of our years, cried out to-night for flowers and little foolish jests and gay laughter, for tarts and daisy chains. It was a very long time since Mr. Peterkin had seen any one stringing daisy chains. And what a pretty pastime it was!

Distant sounds of music broke through the gathering dusk, drew near with an accompanying tread and sweep of feet, then passed away again into silence. Impatient boys were setting off preliminary crackers. By-and-by a one-armed man with an organ came below his window and creakily ground out "Home, Sweet Home." Mr. Peterkin was not distinctly musical. He did not know the names of many tunes, but he recognised "Home, Sweet Home." "Be it e—ever so humble," reluctantly groaned forth the organ, "There's—no—o—place—like—home."

He threw the one-armed man a silver coin, and then drew back from the window, made shy and embarrassed by the musician's exaggerated bows and thanks. After a little while he peeped out cautiously, and seeing the organ-grinder had gone, he went back to his seat by the window. The music of the organ had not cheered him. On the contrary, he felt unaccountably old and melancholy, with a sombre suspicion that he had allowed the best thing in life to pass him by, and yet he scarcely knew what that was. Presently the lights of the City winked through the darkness, and many-coloured rockets went streaming up to the sky.

Had there been a fire in the grate, the room would not have looked so cold and grey, but there was no cheerful blaze, only a horrible invention in white paper. Mr. Peterkin's housekeeper did not approve of fires in summer-time. She had a few fetishes, and the calendar was one. The calendar said summer began on the first of May, and Mrs. MacFlint did not believe it probable the calendar could be mistaken. At times Mr. Peterkin wistfully wished it were possible to remodel his housekeeper, but it is not easy—even for ripe Egyptian scholars—to reform women of sixty-five with limited educations. So Mr. Peterkin bore his ills with philosophical silence, and turned for comfort to the ancient Egyptians. But to-night he sighed heavily.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. PETERKIN had gone up to London to attend the yearly meeting of the British Association. I remember it was a particularly brilliant gathering that year, and the paper of Mr. Peterkin was acknowledged on all hands, and by the ablest critics, to be the paper of the Association. Letters of congratulation and pink notes of invitation were showered upon Mr. Peterkin. Being human, he smiled a little over these pleasant words of praise, not wholly ill-pleased; but the pink invitations he resolutely refused.

At the earliest opportunity he retired from the friendly din and bustle of the Association, and returned to the Library. More letters were awaiting him there, but these he thrust into a drawer and went to greet his assistant.

Mr. Peterkin's trip to London had done him good. He looked quite flushed and young as he hesitated at the library door. It was a wet morning, and so far no visitors had arrived. Janet stood high up on the library steps arranging some books. Her dress clung closely about her, accentuating the slenderness of her figure. The colour came very readily to Janet's cheeks. She blushed now, as she caught sight of Mr. Peterkin, and came neatly down the steps, holding back her gown with one slim hand. But when she had shaken hands with him, the bright carnation ebbed from her face, leaving it pale and wan, with dark circles under the eyes.

"You are ill," he exclaimed involuntarily, forgetting to drop her hand.

"Only sleepy," she answered, colouring and smiling faintly.

"Sleepy? How is that?"

"I have been sitting up all night. My little brother is ill; he caught cold," she replied.

Mr. Peterkin's open eyes expressed enquiry.

"It was that day on the hill," she explained. "Perhaps you may not remember, but it grew suddenly cold in the evening; and he has been delicate always. It is pleurisy."

She turned aside her head to hide the quivering lips.

"And you are anxious?" he asked quickly.

She nodded. With the big tears in one's throat one cannot speak.

"Dear me! Dear me!" he murmured sympathetically.

Janet drew away her hand, and groping for her pocket-handkerchief, sat down on the library steps, suddenly feeling very weak.

"Oh, don't," expostulated Mr. Peterkin. "Please don't."

A sob shook her slender shoulders, and she buried her face in her hands.

"Oh, don't cry, please," he repeated in acute distress. But she sobbed afresh. Then Mr. Peterkin stretched forth his hand very fearfully and diffidently, and stroked the pretty, soft hair. "He is young. He will get better, Miss—Janet."

She sat still struggling with her emotion, and after a few moments she fiercely dried her eyes and lifted her head.

"Excuse me, Mr. Peterkin. It is stupid—childish of me. I have never been broken down before—but—but—" her voice quivered again. "We are all so fond of Hughie. Oh, Mr. Peterkin," she cried out, looking up at him with the great tears overbrimming her eyes, "when one loves much, love hurts one very much."

"Miss Janet," he said slowly, "do you know I have it in my mind to envy you? It is not the very hardest thing in the world to have some one to weep for."

"Not!" She looked at him, startled. "Is it sadder to be alone?"

"Ay." He bent his head.

"Are you alone, Mr. Peterkin?" she said timidly.

He nodded again. "Yes, I am alone."

His hand, as if oppressed by its own boldness, had slid from her head, and now hung despondently by his side. She took it up in her young, warm clasp, and held it pressed between her two soft hands.

"I am sorry," she said simply, as a little child might.

A strange thrill went up Mr. Peterkin's arm. He was about to speak, but just then a creaking step was heard in the outer library. She let his hand fall, yet not hastily, and rose up.

"I thank you for your sympathy," she said, with a gentle dignity, and moved away.

The footstep proved to be that of Mr. Paton.

"Well, Mr. Peterkin," he cried, breaking in with expansive blandness. "Ah! and Miss Muir. Busy as usual, my dear young lady, and blooming as usual. No need to ask how you are—a look is sufficient."

Mr. Paton could never, under any circumstances, forget his gallant manners to the fair sex, but he now turned as briskly as they would permit of him to the librarian.

"Well, well, well, my dear sir, what's all this we hear about you? You've been and gone and done it with a vengeance. I thought I must positively just look in this morning to offer my humble congratulations. Read your speech this morning in the papers, at least the gist of it, and really, you know, my dear sir, really now, it was very fine indeed."

Mr. Peterkin looked unhappy.

"Oh, the newspapers take too much notice of that sort of thing," he said coldly, walking towards the door.

Had Mr. Paton not had a high regard for the proprieties, he would inevitably have winked at this moment, but as it was, he contented himself with an expressive "so like Peterkin" elevation of his eyebrows, as he followed him out of the room.

"But really, now, Mr. Peterkin, you are too modest; far too modest by half. Pardon me, my dear sir, but it doesn't pay in this generation; it doesn't pay. Think a lot of yourself, say I, and you'll get others to think a lot of you. That's my maxim. Now, if it weren't for the papers we should never know how highly to think of you, Mr. Peterkin; positively, now, it's a fact we should not. I'm eternally grateful to the newspapers, I am indeed."

A whimsical light shone for a moment in the librarian's puckered-up eyes, and half smiled upon his lips. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but the habit of silence in Mr. Paton's company was too strong for him, and he closed it again. A book lay conveniently near his hand.

"Ah, I see I'm not wanted. I must make myself scarce; in a word, 'Go off,'" cried Mr. Paton, in high good-humour. "You wouldn't say so for worlds, or wish me to feel so. No, of course not; but my

intuition tells me such is the case. Ah, you men of genius! You men of genius! 'Gey ill to live with,' as was said of the great Sage of Chelsea."

Mr. Paton playfully shook a fat forefinger at the librarian, and playfully creaked towards the door.

"Oh, stop, Mr. Paton. One word. In a case—a case—say of very violent cold or pleurisy, would grapes be out of place?"

Mr. Paton had reached the door, and there he stood, with his eyes and mouth wide open.

"My dear sir, I scarcely grasp your meaning. Pleurisy! Violent cold! You have neither, I devoutly hope and trust."

Mr. Peterkin blushed.

"No, no, no. I was simply stating a— a case."

"Oh, a case. An imaginary case, I presume!" Mr. Paton creaked thoughtfully into the middle of the room. "That makes a difference, of course. Well, yes; I should think grapes quite suitable for an imaginary case. What do you say, my dear sir? Not likely to do a patient any great harm, eh?"

"No," said Mr. Peterkin, in a low voice. "Thank you!"

"Not at all, not at all. Don't mention it. Now, if there's anything else I can do for you in the world—anything you would like to consult me about, I'm sure I should be only too happy. Quite at your service, my dear Mr. Peterkin."

Mr. Paton rubbed his hands in delighted expectancy, reluctant to go. But the librarian acknowledging his offer with a silent bow, and evincing no further desire for advice, Mr. Paton was finally forced to creak out of the room.

"Very singular question, though, that of Peterkin's," he reflected. "But interesting, most decidedly interesting as a queer trait of genius. I must take a note of it. I must tell the committee about it."

Mr. Paton revelled in the eccentricities of genius. He would have made a very admirable Boswell had his Johnson but permitted him.

Hughie did not die. Very white, and wan, and shadowy was the little body the trembling soul brought back with it from the mystery of that door beyond which the great secret lies. And pale, too, had grown the faces of the three women who had tended him, and watched over him, and prayed for him.

"But he's getting better now, thank Heaven," said the mother, with grateful tears in her eyes.

"And after he grows quite well and strong," said Kate resolutely, "we must be firm with Hughie. We must harden our hearts against him, mother, otherwise we shall make a little ruin of our young man. Now who has been giving him more grapes to-day?"

"My dear, they are Mr. Peterkin's grapes. They came last night."

"Very kind of Mr. Peterkin, I am sure, and they are beauties. His grapes always are beauties, wherever they come from. But all the same, now that we've got Hughie so far up the hill, he is not to be knocked down again with a grape-shot. Not a bad pun that, eh, mother? Janet, why so dull? Why don't you pay me the tribute of a laugh?"

"I beg your pardon," said Janet, waking up with a start. "Were you speaking to me, Kate?"

"I was speaking to every one who has ears to hear or a mind to appreciate true wit," said Kate, with great dignity, "but I sadly fear, my young friend, you have neither. I shall not again cast my pearls before swine."

"I like the Sparrow," announced Hughie gravely, picking up a big fat purple grape. "Last night when you were out at hospital and Janet was taking beef-tea to old Mrs. Wuddie, he came to see mother and me, and I told him a story all myself."

"Oh, Hughie, a story? What sort of a story?"

"A story Janet once told me about a Prince, and I said she made it all up out of her own head, and he said, 'My little man, your sister is very clever. It is a beautiful story.' Why are your cheeks so red, Jennie? Are you angry?"

"Yes, very angry; quite furious. When I tell you stories, Hughie, you must never, never tell them to any one, not to any one, remember—they are private stories—or I shall never be able to tell you any more."

"But he likes stories; he said he did. And when I said: 'Who tells you stories, Mr. Peterkin?' he said: 'No one.' I think it was a very melan—melantoly thing," wound up Hughie, with such severe virtue in his little voice as made them all laugh.

The summer days were stretching out longer and longer.

Janet had kept bravely and uncomplainingly at her work through all the time of sorrow and anxiety, but now the strain was removed, although she would scarce

own it, she felt curiously languid and drooping.

Mr. Peterkin, in one of his rare conversations with the committee, hinted that he should feel obliged if they could arrange to let his assistant have a holiday, and the committee, in their slow and methodical way, jumped—if one might dare to use such a skittish expression—at the hint. What would not the committee have done to oblige the learned Mr. Peterkin? They at least were aware of their blessing, which not all of us are.

Janet felt grateful, yet her expressive face did not look altogether bright, as she entered the librarian's room to bid him farewell. She no longer felt afraid of him, only at times shy, with a queer, novel shyness which she could not understand or define.

He rose eagerly from his chair when she entered, and held out his hand.

"You have come to say good-bye, Miss Janet?"

"Yes, we leave to-morrow for Largen Bay. It will be good for Hughie."

"Doubtless; it will be beneficial to you too, Miss Janet."

"Me? Oh, I'm quite well," she protested with a quick blush. "There is nothing the matter with me."

Then a moment afterwards, fearing her words sounded cold, she added with sweet graciousness:

"But I am very grateful for my holiday, thanks very much to you, Mr. Peterkin; I shall like the rest very much indeed."

He repudiated her thanks with a slight gesture.

"We—the committee—I—shall miss you, Miss Janet," he said slowly, holding her hand.

"Shall you?" she returned, a brightness coming into her face. "I am glad of that; I like to be missed."

A shaft of sunlight flung itself through the partially closed blind, and turned her ruddy brown hair to a crown of gold.

Mr. Peterkin looked at the fair face wistfully.

"Yes, I shall miss you," he said again, and sighed.

"Thank you," said Janet softly, and drew away her hand.

"Miss Janet!"

"Yes!" she whispered, and her eyes fell.

"I am old and tame," he began, "but—but—" the words that sprang up from his heart formed themselves into the

old, timeless, unconquerable argument :
 "But I love you, Miss Janet."

And Janet lifted up her sweet brown eyes, and said what no one in the wide world ever expected her to say :

"And I love you."

It was unexpected, unaccountable, perhaps—although there is some variety of opinion on that point—unorthodox, as I expect most real love scenes are. When the committee had planned the Library, little thought they this sedate room would be the setting to a love idyll; still less did they imagine the librarian as its hero. Was Mr. Peterkin's face really transformed by that subtle wizard we call Love, or was it only in Janet's eyes it appeared at that moment and ever afterwards the finest face upon earth?

It is not for me to say. I have always admired Mr. Peterkin immensely, and therefore am inclined to be prejudiced. Only I wish you had seen the faces of the committee when they heard the news.

"But Peterkin!" cried Mr. Paton, when at last he found speech. "Peterkin, of all men in the world! I am amazed! I am astounded! Why, he was a woman-hater! A confirmed old bachelor! He must have gone mad."

"Pooh!" said the Colonel. "'Tis a madness not uncommon to the race. Peterkin's only forty, and human. I expect he couldn't help himself."

Which was one of the truest things I ever heard the Colonel say. I do not know that Mr. Peterkin ever could explain his conduct very clearly to himself or to any one else; for, thank Heaven, there are some very fine things in this sceptical age which we cannot explain away.

I am not at all certain that Mr. Peterkin's conduct did not surprise himself more than any one else, and I know he has never to this day got over the first great humble wonder at his own happiness.

"But you mustn't call him the Sparrow any more," said Janet, laying her soft, radiant face against Hughie's pillow.

"Well," exclaimed Kate, "a feather might knock me down! I never—no, never—expected to see you so silly, Janet! Did you, mother?"

Mrs. Muir only smiled. A tear lurked near the smile, and the smile and the tear meant a great many things.

"Kate," said Janet bravely, growing a rosier red, "do you know it's very nice to be silly—sometimes?"

And, really and truly, so it is.

RICHENDA.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "*The Thirteenth Brydairn*," "*Catherine Maidment's Burden*," "*Benefit of Clergy*," "*The Fear's Aunt*," etc. etc.

CHAPTER XL

"Oh, I'm so very nice and happy!"

"You are, are you? That's all right."

Sir Roderick Graeme and his small god-child, Veronica, were driving up Regent Street together in Sir Roderick's hansom. It was Veronica's birthday, the twentieth of July, and Sir Roderick, by way of a birthday treat, had first taken her out to lunch with him at a restaurant, and then taken her into Bond Street to choose for herself the gold bangle that was to be his birthday present to her. Both these episodes had been very successfully passed through, and the two were now returning together to Bryanston Street. Veronica was sitting very upright on her side of the cab, and very still; her excitement had taken the form of reflective stillness and quiet now; but in her pretty cotton smock were countless creases and crumples which bore testimony to a considerable degree of bygone restlessness. Indeed, at starting, the restlessly excited spirits of the delighted child had alarmed Sir Roderick into thinking that he had undertaken more than he could well manage. But Veronica had calmed down by degrees; the strangeness of the restaurant, the concentration necessary to choose what she wished for most for luncheon, and the solemnity of the waiter, had all acted in a subduing manner. The presence of the latter had been no check to Veronica's flow of conversation—she had asked Sir Roderick audibly enough where the man lived, why he wore black, and if she must leave some of her pudding for his dinner—still, these and all her further remarks had been uttered in an almost awestruck tone. And in the jeweller's shop, except during the moment when she had insisted, much to Sir Roderick's confusion, on mounting a chair to kiss and hug him, she had been, when the actual choice was made, quite silent with the excess of her joy. Her words now broke into a silence which had lasted since the cab turned the corner into Regent Street.

She gave a little sigh of the deepest content as she spoke, and as the young man heard her his own good-natured face was nearly as radiant as hers.

"It would be hard if one wasn't happy

on a birthday, wouldn't it?" he added lightly.

"Is every one quite as happy on their birthdays as me?" enquired Veronica. "Is the crossing-sweepers nice and happy on theirs?"

This train of thought had been suggested because Sir Roderick had, a moment earlier, thrown a sixpence to a crossing-sweeper who was close to them as they moved slowly through a block. He looked a trifle puzzled as the round childish eyes appealed to him for an answer, and he said at length, consideringly: "I don't really know, Veronica."

"Don't you!" she exclaimed. "I thought when people was old like you they knowed everything."

He laughed.

"No, Veronica, they know very little indeed," he said.

"But you knowed all about that crossing-sweeper. He touched his hat at you. I would like to know if he's as happy as me. Only I don't think he is! I've only got one sorry, and that's an old sorry—not belonging to to-day. I haven't one for to-day; not one!"

"What's your 'old sorry' about?"

Sir Roderick laughed as he spoke, Veronica's words had been so quaintly spoken, and the little high voice had been so fervent.

"Oh, it's a great long sorry. It'll last till she goes—it's about nursey. Don't you know it?"

Sir Roderick had been gazing mechanically at the distant blue sky visible at the end of the street, but he withdrew his eyes rather quickly and turned them down to his small companion.

"No, I don't know it," he said. "Tell me what it is, Veronica."

"I thought every one knowed," she said wonderingly, looking up at him. "Nursey's going right away from us. Going for always."

"Going for always?"

Sir Roderick repeated the words in a mechanical tone. He seemed to be turning over something in his own mind, and he spoke slowly.

"Yes." Veronica's little voice was becoming excited. She was not too young to know the excitement of imparting news. "We shan't have her for our nurse any more, and we are so sorry."

"When is she going? Who told you?"

Sir Roderick spoke almost sharply. His consideration had apparently merged itself

into a desire for more information. Veronica's pleasure in giving it developed her answer into detail.

"She's going away quite soon. It'll be before we go to the sea. It's a dreadful pity she can't come with us to the sea. Me and Brian and Dolly had made up such beautiful games to play on the sand with her. And she said she likes the sea so much."

Veronica paused, and in the pause Sir Roderick repeated the second of his questions.

"Who told you?" he said again.

"Nursey told us. On one day long ago she told us. She said she was 'bliged to go. I don't know why. She only said she was 'bliged. She said she was so sorry. And I said so too. Brian got up in her lap and I think he cried, only he didn't want me to say so, but I heard him sniff, and there was his tears on nursey's frock, I saw them. And me and Dolly cried. And nursey almost cried herself. Her eyes was all wet. You don't never quite cry when you're grown up, you know, do you? And she kissed us; and it is such a great sorry that she's going. We do love her so. I went and asked mother, when she came in, if she couldn't make nursey not go. And mother said no; she must go."

Veronica paused, this time for breath. Much to her surprise, Sir Roderick did not speak. She stood too much in awe of him to reason with him on his silence, nor did she understand what she had expected him to do; so she only sat gazing at him in childish amazement.

"Are you sorry too she's going?" she said at last.

But at this instant the cab turned into Bryanston Street, and Sir Roderick, who had for the last few moments been gazing straight before him into space, turned round and said suddenly:

"Is your mother at home, Veronica?"

"Yes, I b'lieve so, godfather. She said she'd be at home, because she told us we might come down after tea and see her. Are you coming to tea, godfather?"

The cab had stopped at the door of number twelve by this time. Sir Roderick had lifted out Veronica and set her on the pavement, and he moved away to give some orders to his servant before he answered her.

"Yes," he said simply, at last, following Veronica into the house as he spoke. "Tell her I'm here with you," he added to Veronica, who was already rushing up the stairs to display her bangle.

Glancing after the flying little figure with

a half smile, he repeated his injunction formally to the parlourmaid, and then betook himself to the drawing-room with the assurance belonging to his position of friend of the house.

He entered it, and found himself quite alone in it; but instead of establishing himself in one of the chairs, or taking up any single one of the society papers and magazines that lay in some confusion on the Venetian mosaic table, he went straight into the back drawing-room, and began, slowly and undecidedly, to pace up and down it. He was evidently lost in thought, for he started when the door of the larger half of the room creaked on Mrs. Fitzgerald's entrance.

"The maid said you had called upon me, Sir Roderick!" she said, laughing as she made her way across the room to meet him at the draped arch leading to the further end of the room. "But if she was mistaken, and you called to walk about the drawing-room solely, perhaps you'd like me to retire again!"

"I did want to see you," he said a little confusedly. "I came on purpose to see you."

"Sit down like a Christian then, and do so!"

Mrs. Fitzgerald pulled forward a chair as she spoke, and motioned to her guest to take it.

"I wanted very much to see you," she added, as she sank into her own. "So it's very nice of you to be here. I wanted to thank you for Veronica's day. She is in the seventh heaven of delight! And what a fascinating bangle you've given the child, you thoroughly extravagant godfather!"

"Oh—I'm glad she liked it!" he returned absently.

His manner made Mrs. Fitzgerald scan his face wonderingly. She had established herself as she always did, with her back to the light, and Sir Roderick's face opposite to her, was lighted by the afternoon light that crept even into the carefully shaded room. It was a good deal preoccupied and somewhat perplexed. Mrs. Fitzgerald began to wonder if Sir Roderick had lost money; the most obvious form of misfortune, and the most deplorable, to her mind. But if he had done so, it was not likely, she reasoned, that he wanted to tell her about it. Her acquaintances, to her own complete satisfaction, were not at all in the habit of coming to Mrs. Fitzgerald for sympathy.

She had just relinquished that idea in favour of another.

"Some girl!" she said to herself with

considerable irritation, when Sir Roderick spoke.

"Mrs. Fitzgerald," he began. His voice was very unusual, and his simple, straightforward face strangely diffident. "I couldn't make up my mind whether I had better speak to you or not; now I have. I have no doubt that you will think me horribly interfering, and possibly most impertinent; but Veronica tells me you are parting with the children's nurse."

"Veronica told you what was quite true."

Mrs. Fitzgerald's face had displayed some wonder before; now it displayed what was little short of amaze. Her voice was distinctly stiff as she gave the brief response. Sir Roderick's ears were quick to catch its intimation.

"I see you do think it absolutely unpardonable on my part," he said humbly enough. "But having begun, having made up my mind to say it, I'm going through with it, whatever you think. Are you sending that poor girl away because of—because Kennaway has behaved like a cur and a cad? Because, if so, I beg your pardon, but it's an abominable shame, and that's all about it!"

Sir Roderick paused, breathless. He had spoken very hotly, and in his eagerness had leaned forward in his chair towards Mrs. Fitzgerald. Now he sank back in it and dragged fiercely at his moustache.

At this inopportune moment, Amelia and the other parlourmaid appeared with the tea equipage. During the decidedly lengthy time which the two women took to carry out their duties in arrangement and so forth, Sir Roderick and Mrs. Fitzgerald made energetically spasmodic conversation on the subject of a forthcoming fashionable wedding. The moment the door closed on the maids, however, Mrs. Fitzgerald, who was in the act of pouring out a cup of tea, set down the silver teapot abruptly, and let both her hands fall on her lap.

"What in the world do you mean, and what can you know about it?" she said.

"I was there," he said emphatically. "I saw it all."

"Saw what? Let us be sure we're talking about the same thing," Mrs. Fitzgerald said slowly.

"Well, I don't much care about blackening Kennaway's character for him. I'm not his conscience-keeper; and it's a rather low trick to call an absent man over the coals. But when it's a matter of justice I don't so much care. I shall say what I think, and I do say that of all the mean, despicable——"

"Come to the point, Sir Roderick," broke in Mrs. Fitzgerald, half mocking, half anxious to stem the flow of forcible denunciation which was very evidently beginning. "I don't now understand what you saw, or what you think you saw."

Sir Roderick set down abruptly the cup of tea Mrs. Fitzgerald had given him, and drew his chair two or three inches further forward, as if he thought personal proximity would lend weight to his words.

"Look here," he said, "I'll begin at the beginning. You know that night—it's some time ago, I know, but I can't for the life of me say which day—that night on which you went to the Morrisons' theatre dinner, and asked me to come here to supper afterwards? You remember?"

Mrs. Fitzgerald nodded.

"I was coming along," he went on, "up the street. I was much too early, and I thought, as you couldn't have got back, I'd better saunter about a bit; so I was going to stroll up to the top of the street, when I heard a queer little scream. I'd seen a man and a woman coming towards me, but I'd taken no notice of them. I looked up now, though, like a shot, and I've goodish sight, so I saw the man was trying to kiss the girl, and she was trying all she knew to get away from him. I put on steam, and when I got up to them it was Kennaway, and—and your nurse, you know. She was—well, I never saw a girl look so thankful to see a fellow-creature. I just chucked Kennaway for her, and made a few remarks of my own to him, and she was gone indoors like a flash. And that's all about it. I should never have spoken of it—it wasn't my business—if Veronica hadn't told me the girl was going, but when I heard that, I thought I'd ask you if she was going for that. Because if she is, it's the very blackest shame! It was no more her fault than it was mine. I do assure you that if turning out is to be done at all, it is Kennaway you ought to turn out of this house, and not that poor girl."

Sir Roderick paused abruptly.

Mrs. Fitzgerald was drinking her tea, in slow, reflective sips; she was evidently altogether unmoved by the eagerness of Sir Roderick's manner.

"I must say," she said coolly, "that I do not engage my nurses to compromise themselves with one of my friends, and then to be hotly defended by another."

Sir Roderick coloured.

"I am defending the truth," he said hastily; "not the girl only—though I'm most awfully sorry for her. I like fair

play; and that's what made me speak. I seem to have wasted my energy," he added, rather bitterly.

"If you thought your energy—by which you mean your championship, I suppose—was likely to make me change my mind, you were mistaken. I have made up my mind to send the girl away, and nothing will alter it."

"Not even the fact that the proceeding is undeserved and unjust?"

In Sir Roderick's eyes an unusual light was shining, a light that looked like anger; and anger, to his good-natured and easy-going soul, was a passion almost unknown. Mrs. Fitzgerald saw the light plainly, and her consciousness of it added a touch of acerbity to her voice as she answered:

"It is not undeserved. Not even your clear account, Sir Roderick, of the proceedings of the moment, can acquit the girl of having entangled Mr. Kennaway at first."

"Kennaway is not so easily entangled!" said Sir Roderick in a low voice.

"She has met him before," went on Mrs. Fitzgerald, disregarding the interruption, "and has encouraged him to walk and talk with her and the children—"

"I don't believe it!" broke out Sir Roderick.

Mrs. Fitzgerald laughed mockingly.

"Come now!" she said, "this is going rather too far. If you are going to contradict my statements flatly in my own house, Sir Roderick, because of this idiotic girl, it only makes a stronger reason, if I needed one, for getting rid of a woman who is an annoyance to my friends, and through them an intense annoyance to me. Go she must, and shall!"

Sir Roderick coloured once more.

"I—I beg your pardon," he said humbly; "it was awfully rude of me to speak as I did. But it does seem so fearfully hard, don't you know. I know it was his fault, you see."

"And I know it was hers."

"And won't it—I don't really know anything about these things—but if you send her away like this, won't it make it rather hard for her to get another place?"

The words were spoken diffidently, and Sir Roderick's whole manner was deprecating, yet underneath the surface there was a simple determination to do his very best to make one last effort in the cause he had undertaken.

"She should have thought of that before."

Mrs. Fitzgerald's voice was hopelessly

hard, but Sir Roderick went steadily and awkwardly on.

"So couldn't you give her another turn—another try on, or something of that sort? I would say a few more words to Kenna-way, you see, because I was there, and——"

Sir Roderick was interrupted. Mrs. Fitzgerald put down her tea-cup with a sharp little clatter.

"I think," she said, very coldly, "we have had more than enough useless discussion on an unimportant subject. You drive me to say horrid things to you, Sir Roderick; you drive me to say that I must be permitted to manage my own affairs myself. Are you going to the Trevertons to-night?"

The last sentence was spoken with a complete change of manner, and the change confused Sir Roderick almost as much as the preceding part of Mrs. Fitzgerald's speech had humiliated him.

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered, "I'm no end sorry I said anything. I'm going to-night, yes."

"Oh, you are!" she said lightly. "I'm glad. It'll be such an awfully dead-alive function, I shall want all the friends I can get hold of. By the way, that little cat, Blanche Treverton, has caught some one at last, they say. I suppose this affair is to blaze it abroad a little."

Sir Roderick was feeling—as he himself expressed it—that he "had made an impertinent fool of himself for nothing," and he plunged into the social gossip thus offered to him with a vigour that was a criterion both of his wounded self-respect, and of his disappointment at losing his cause so hopelessly.

CHAPTER XII.

SIR RODERICK GRAEME was spending an evening at home. This most unusual circumstance said plainly that it was the fag-end of the season; for at no other time of the year would he have had a whole evening at his own disposal. He was not spending it alone; Mr. Powell, the young man who had formed one of Mrs. Fitzgerald's dinner-party on the night when Veronica had walked in her sleep, was spending it with him. That is to say, Mr. Powell had, at Sir Roderick's invitation, accompanied him to a music-hall after a dinner together at the latter's club. They had found the music-hall, in spite of its claims to be cooler than any other spot in London, unendurably hot, and they had

sauntered out of it again in an hour, and had betaken themselves to Sir Roderick's flat to refresh themselves at their leisure.

The man who shared the flat with Sir Roderick had gone out of town, so that the latter and his guest were to-night in undisturbed possession of its smoking-room. The owners called it a smoking-room, but it was a curious, masculine compound of library and breakfast-room into the bargain. It was, in fact, their only living-room, save a small, Liberty-furnished drawing-room which was rarely opened except when they entertained at tea any of the ladies of their acquaintance. The smoking-room was justified of its name at present. On a square, small table in a bow-window were cigars and whisky; and on each side of the table, each in the most comfortable easy-chair he had been able to find, sat Sir Roderick and Mr. Powell. They were both smoking, and both silent.

It was half-past eleven. Through the open window came the cool night air, bringing with it a subdued sound of cabs dashing hither and thither in the distance, taking people home from the theatres. The distant noise and bustle, subdued though it was, seemed to make the quiet room all the quieter by contrast. And this fact seemed to have struck an idea out of the somewhat slow brain of Mr. Powell.

"Better off here than there," he remarked, indicating with a vague gesture of the hand that held his cigar the heated metropolis as a whole.

Sir Roderick nodded, but he did not speak. Another silence ensued. Another idea suggested itself to Mr. Powell. The average flow of his ideas might be said to be one an hour. At least, if he had more, he gave no utterance to them. His capacity for silence was practically unlimited. But with this capacity for silence he had a dim idea that if friendly intercourse was to be kept going, some sort of converse must be maintained. And for this Mr. Powell depended on whatever man he might be with at the moment. Sir Roderick always had completely fulfilled his requirements in this respect. A word or two had invariably set going a monologue of easy comment on things in general, interspersed with much that was amusing to Mr. Powell. And Mr. Powell liked what he called a "'musin' sort of fellow."

To-night, however, he had tried no fewer than four times to set going Sir Roderick's flow of talk, and four times had he signally failed. Twice he had been met with mono-

syllables, twice only with nods from his host. It was the fourth and last failure that had suggested to him that there must be some reason for this unusual state of things; and he proceeded to put his idea into succinct words.

"Chippy, old fellow?" he enquired.

Sir Roderick started, and seemed to bring his thoughts back from a long distance. He had been gazing vacantly out through the open window. He turned round and knocked the ash off his cigar sharply.

"Chippy? Nonsense! Why on earth should I be chippy?"

"You're so quiet to-night, don't you know."

Mr. Powell's remark was not forcibly expressed, but it was scarcely deserving of the withering comments it drew down upon him.

"Quiet! Why, man alive, it's not necessary to talk from morning to night, is it? If you want that sort of thing, I should take a cab to the Zoo, and spend the evening in the monkey house."

Sir Roderick poured out some whisky for himself with a hasty gesture as he ended, and Mr. Powell shrank into as small a space as he could in silence. He recovered slowly; then he brought the full force of his mental powers to bear upon the question of what could have happened to make Sir Roderick so different to his usual self. He pursued the quest for nearly twenty minutes, but quite in vain. At the end of that time he rose, and murmured something about "looking up" a friend he had promised to see that night.

Sir Roderick rose too, hastily.

"You mean that you are going to look up some livelier society!" he said. "I'm really awfully sorry I've been so dull and stupid; I suppose the heat addles one's brains. But I'm sorry, I am indeed, Powell."

Mr. Powell made another murmur, intended to convey deprecation of this self-accusation on Sir Roderick's part, and then he found his bat and took his departure. Sir Roderick escorted him to the door and watched him go down the stone staircase of the flats with a deep sigh of relief. Then he returned to his room, shut the door, and flung himself back into his chair.

"I can think in peace now, at any rate," he muttered.

It was the beginning of August. Rather more than ten days had gone by since the afternoon when Sir Roderick had tried to plead Richenda Leicester's cause with Mrs.

Fitzgerald. During these days he had gone through more mental disturbance than he had known in all the preceding years of his easy life. It is perhaps scarcely necessary to say that the mental disturbance all centred itself around the thought of Richenda Leicester. He had not known it at the time, he had not even dreamed of such a possibility, but on the long-past afternoon when Veronica had taken him up into the nursery he had fallen in love with Mrs. Fitzgerald's pretty nurse. Sir Roderick had never in his life been in love before. He had had as many flirtations as half the years of his life; but as he had never intended them to be anything but flirtations, they had glided away from his consciousness without leaving any impression behind. Certainly not one of them had contained anything that could teach him the nature of a real attachment. Perhaps this was the reason why he utterly failed to recognise his interest in Richenda Leicester as anything remarkable. He thought of her much and often, on the days that followed that first sight of her; but he thought of her only as a pretty and unusual sort of girl. When he found himself angry with Fergus Kennaway for admiring her, as he did on the night of Mrs. Fitzgerald's dinner-party, he never once reasoned with himself as to the cause of his anger. He was not given to reasoning with himself, nor to contemplating his inner self in any way. So that the deepening of this interest in her, produced by their contact on the day of Brian's fall into the Serpentine, passed entirely unnoticed by him.

The thought which had shot into his mind on the afternoon when he met her at the New Gallery, the thought that she was sweeter and nicer than any woman he knew, was almost as great a shock to him as was the self-revelation that followed it; the revelation, brought out by her confidences about her brothers, of his desire to stand in the same place in Richenda's thoughts and heart as they did. But the shock and its effects passed away altogether from him with his sudden realisation of the difference in their respective positions in life; and except as a vague background Richenda had scarcely been in his thoughts until the day when he defended her from Fergus Kennaway. Even then, his strongest emotion had been a fierce wrath against Kennaway. And of the reason for that wrath he had, once more, thought but little.

It was not until the day when Veronica told him that Richenda Leicester was to

go away that the truth broke upon his astounded senses. After he had pleaded Richenda's cause he all at once understood that he loved her, that he had loved her all the time, and that her interests were his interests. The discovery was almost overwhelming to him, he had suspected it so little; but he faced it steadily, and he faced it seriously; and the question that had arisen out of his discovery was the root of the mental disturbance he was undergoing. It was a very natural one: he loved Richenda Leicester with all his heart, but did he or did he not wish to marry her?

At first there had been in his mind only one clamorous answer to it. Marry her! Why, of course he should marry her, and that as soon as it was possible for him to do so. But gradually, and with much reluctance on his part, the other side of the case had forced itself upon him, and that other side was fraught with doubt and difficulty to his mind. In the first place, he had long ago, as has been said, made up his mind not to marry; he had so long been in the habit of regarding himself as only just able to support himself on his very comfortable income, that the thought of supporting any one else upon it seemed like madness. But slowly and by degrees he came to admit to himself that he supposed it might be done; he supposed other men managed it on his income, and managed it well, too. So possibly, just possibly, there might be ways and means of managing that part of it. But there was to him a far more hopeless difficulty to

be got over. It was to him, it would have been to any man with his training, impossible to think of marrying any one out of his own "set."

Richenda Leicester, from Sir Roderick's point of view, belonged to altogether another life. It was not the fact of her being in the position of a servant that emphasized this for him; he would have felt it all the same if she had been a governess, a country clergyman's daughter, or anything else of a like nature. She was not of his own world, she was not known by it or acknowledged by it; it would most assuredly lift its eyebrows, shrug its shoulders, and laugh at him if he were to suggest such a step as marrying a being so different from anything it recognised as a possible wife for any man. And to fly in the face of what had formed his opinions and shaped his course for him all his life, was, to Sir Roderick, next to impossible. But at the back of his heart, shining as it were through these great obstacles, were his real true love and longing. Between these forces poor Sir Roderick had fought a rather wearing battle, and to-night, with a touch of the strength that lurked uncalled-for in his seemingly simple, easy nature, he had made up his mind that he had had enough of indecision, and that the contest should end, one way or the other. To-night while he sat gazing out of the window and ignoring Mr. Powell, he had said to himself that he would settle it before he slept. And he had flung himself into his arm-chair to think out, finally, what he meant to do.

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By MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

Author of "A Valiant Ignorance," "A Mere Cypher,"
"Cross Currents," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A COLD March wind was chilling London through and through. It was blowing straight from the north-east, and it had driven up heavy masses of lead-coloured cloud which drifted slowly and broodingly across the sky. All colour seemed to have been shrivelled out of the world. Streets and houses seemed to have taken on a monotone of neutral tint which was inexpressibly depressing. Smartly dressed women were shut up in broughams; and the mass of working womanhood, whose care-laden steps cover the length and breadth of London from morning until night, was in its dreariest bad weather garb. Every now and then sharp storms of bitter rain broke; adding yet another element of chill discomfort in the mud and slush which they created.

Even a large hospital, with its inevitable monotony, is hardly proof against such atmospheric conditions; and about a certain great building in the east of London there hung an all-pervading gloom. The colour-washed corridor and the stone staircases, with their faint, penetrating odour of disinfectants and anæsthetics, looked cheerless and dark, although it was only four o'clock in the afternoon; and the few footsteps that passed to and fro echoed desolately enough in the quiet.

Passing up the first flight of one of the staircases were two men—one of the hospital porters and Bryan Armitage. They went on in silence up another flight of stairs and along a narrow corridor, and then the

porter stopped and threw open a door. The room thus revealed was a cross between a doctor's consulting room and a private study.

"If you will walk in here, sir," said the man, addressing Bryan deferentially, "Dr. Branston will be at liberty before long. You will find the day's papers on the table, sir!"

"Thanks!" returned Bryan, pleasantly. "I am a little before my time, I'm afraid."

"No, sir, I believe not. The rounds take a little longer some days than others. The doctor is going through the wards, sir."

The man stirred the fire; an attention which, since the guest was unknown to him, was obviously due to the host's position in the hospital; and turning a chair invitingly towards it, withdrew.

Bryan, however, did not take possession of the seat thus tacitly suggested to him. He walked up to the fireplace, and took up a standing position on the hearthrug facing the room. He had grown considerably older-looking in the time which had elapsed since he went abroad; and the lines into which his face was settling were very good ones. They were very attractive also; partly, as of old, by reason of the honest kindness which they seemed to radiate, and partly by reason of a certain steady wistfulness which seemed to underlie the quick and ready sense of humour with which every feature was instinct. His figure had grown broader and less boyish in outline, and his whole manner and appearance had lost that nameless disadvantage which is only to be defined as provincialism.

In spite of that same self-possession, however, it was obvious as he stood there waiting that he was distinctly nervous. His eyes wandered restlessly over his surroundings, and he was a trifle pale.

Bryan had returned to England only a few days before, after an absence of ten months. He had heard through an Alchester correspondent of the tragedy that had shattered Dr. Vallotson's household, and he had written to North at the time—a few lines of feeling too deep to be anything but incoherent in its expression. North had been Bryan Armitage's hero all his life. What unsuspected delicacy of perception had attracted him as a boy towards his unresponsive and unpopular senior it is not possible to say; but the attraction had never faded. As boy and as man, he had given to North Branston that admiring affection which asks for no encouragement; which overlooks—or perhaps in all unconsciousness sees through—the defects which mark its object out for universal condemnation. He had seen North last free from those trammels of which he had been vaguely conscious as Alchester's creation; with success in his hand, with the ball of life at his feet. The change in North which he had then detected was utterly forgotten by him now. The hard, contemptuous patronage which had replaced the careless friendliness with which he himself had always been treated, had faded into the background of his memory. He realised only the gulf which lay between what had been and what was. Tender of feeling, vivid—where his sympathies were concerned—in imagination he was dominated by that poignancy of realisation always engendered by a first meeting with one who comes from out the fire of great suffering. As he stood there in North's room, waiting for its owner, his agitation annihilated the six months that had passed since the blow had fallen, and its horror returned upon him in all its first intensity.

He had been waiting perhaps a quarter of an hour when a step which he recognised sounded along the passage, and North Branston came into the room. He came quickly forward as his visitor advanced to meet him.

"I am afraid you have had to wait, Bryan, boy," he said. "How are you?"

There was no verbal answer. Resolute as he was to add nothing by his agitation to the inevitable pain of the meeting, in that first moment Bryan Armitage found speech beyond him. He could only wring the hand held out to him as though he would never let it go. A slight grave smile just touched North's lips, and then, as though to give the younger man time to

recover himself, he turned away and drew up another chair to the fire, speaking rather lengthily as he did so of the route by which Bryan had come to the hospital, and the length of time it had taken.

Nearly six months had gone by since that chasm which divided past from present had opened in North Branston's life, and those six months had brought to his external personality a change which was not the less striking in that it was very difficult to trace it to its source. Such casual acquaintances as he encountered in these days told one another that "Branston was amazingly aged," basing their criticism upon the fact that the hair about his temples had grown very grey, and upon the worn lines visible about his eyes; but time alone could not have produced the difference which was thus sweepingly characterised. The dark irregular features, a little haggard as though with ceaseless strain, remained practically unaltered; but the expression that informed them was that of a different man. The composure which had fallen on it with the shattering of his life rested on it still, and beneath it all the cynicism, the bitterness, the hardness which had constituted the meaning of his face hitherto had subsided. But that composure itself had changed its character. It was the deliberate and determined self-control of a man whose daily life is a life of endurance. His very voice told the same story. It was the voice of a man the first of whose daily obligations is the obligation of patience.

Some influence from North's manner seemed to touch and still Bryan Armitage's nervousness. He answered North in a low voice and briefly, but coherently, and it was he who broke the moment's pause that followed as they sat down.

"It is very good of you to let me come, North," he said.

North's smile was a singularly fleeting expression, but it gave something to his face of which he was utterly unconscious. He smiled now.

"I am very glad to see you," he said. "Tell me your news."

Never in all the years of their acquaintance had similar words been addressed to Bryan Armitage by his elder, in the tone of unconscious sympathy and interest in which they were uttered now, and a flush of vague pleasure mounted to the young man's face. He recounted with frank and involuntary eagerness such details of his doings during the past months as suggested themselves to his modest mind as interesting; drawn on

by pleasant comments and questions from his hearer; and he stopped at last rather abruptly, self-convicted of having talked exclusively of his own affairs.

There was a pause, which North, perhaps understanding on what topic the younger man must perforce wish to touch, forbore to break.

Then Bryan Armitage leaned suddenly forward, looking straight into the fire, and began to speak in a low, jerking tone.

"I wrote to you here, North," he said, "because I didn't know your address. Where do you live?"

The words in which North Branston answered were brief and matter of fact, but there was nothing forbidding about their tone; and the younger man, still with his eyes averted, went on.

"I heard," he said, with a difficult note of interrogation in his voice, "that you were living with—with——"

He faltered and left his sentence unfinished.

North finished it for him.

"My mother is with me," he said.

The words were spoken perfectly steadily. There was nothing strange or unfamiliar in them to the speaker now. The very deliberation with which they were uttered was intended merely to accustom Bryan Armitage to what was still so new and painful to him. But to the young man's face they brought the colour in a hot rush.

"Yes," he said hurriedly. "I—I understood so!" He paused, and then he said in a tone which was hardly audible: "How is—Mrs. Vallotson?"

A slight, unconscious shade crossed North's face. There was a touch of constraint in his voice as he said:

"She is fairly well, I think."

"Is she—does she—might I call?"

The shade had died away from North's face as he turned to the speaker. But he shook his head.

"No, Bryan," he said gently, and rather sadly. "I wish you might! But it would be of no use, thank you. She sees nobody!"

With an uncertain gesture of acquiescence, Bryan looked back again into the fire, and there was an eloquent silence.

"Can you tell me—do you mind my asking—how they are getting on at Alnchester?"

The words had broken from Bryan, uneven and a little hoarse in tone; North, hearing them, seemed to rouse himself from the abstraction into which he had fallen.

"They are abroad," he said. "I hear of

them only through Archdeacon French, but I hear often. They have been in the South of France for the last two months."

Bryan Armitage started painfully.

"Not for—for their health?" he exclaimed.

"No," returned North. "They are both quite well. They are coming home next month." He stopped and then added quietly: "Physical health is not the only thing that travel is good for."

"They have not left Alnchester for good?"

"No," said North again in a low voice.

"Dr. Vallotson decided otherwise."

"Would it have been better, do you think?"

North raised his hand and let it fall on the arm of his chair with a slow movement of uncertainty.

"He was the only possible judge," he said.

There was another silence. Bryan's fingers were working unconscious destruction, as he leaned forward and unceasingly twisted the handle of a table drawer near him.

"North," he said tentatively and not quite steadily. "Would you mind telling me how Constance took it? I'm a brute to ask you, but I haven't heard a word of her. I wrote to her—I couldn't help it—but she didn't answer! You see—you see——"

"Don't mind asking me," said North with grave kindness. "I cannot tell you much, I'm afraid. I wish I could, Bryan!"

"She has seen her mother since?"

"No!"

With a quick, startled movement Bryan lifted his bent head.

"No?" he repeated. "Why—was that Mrs. Vallotson's wish?"

"No," repeated North sternly, "it was her father's wish, but it was also Constance's own."

"Constance's own?" repeated Bryan incredulously. "Constance's? Why, I thought—I thought——"

"You were mistaken," was the grim response. "I was mistaken, too, though that is less surprising."

"But do you think it is right, North?"

There was a disturbed ring in Bryan's voice, and his face was full of perplexity and pain. North looked at him for a moment and then said:

"No, Bryan."

With a long breath, as though his ideas had received such a shock as necessitated their entire readjustment, the younger man sank back in his chair, gazing straight

before him. North watched him silently, and then realising better than did Bryan himself that the process of readjustment was not to be accomplished without time and pain, he broke up the pause with some words on an indifferent subject.

Bryan roused himself instantly, and made a valiant effort to respond to the lead thus given to the conversation. But in spite of himself his speech was not so ready nor his wits so quick as usual. It was not until he had risen to take leave that his preoccupation seemed to drop away from him, and leave him without a thought except for his host.

"You are settled in town for twelve months, then, at least?" said North.

"I think so," said Bryan. "Yes, I believe there's no doubt of it." He looked at North with his honest eyes full of feeling. "You'll let me see something of you, won't you?" he said. "May I—may I look you up in the evening, sometimes?"

North stretched out his hand warmly.

"We'll meet," he said, "but not at home, Bryan. No one comes to the house. Come here whenever you like."

The young man coloured scarlet; he felt that he had blundered, and had not made himself clear.

"Yes," he said confusedly. "I understand, of course, that—that I should see no one but you if I came to your place. But—if I came to see you? Do you see no one at home?"

"No one!" said North quietly.

Startled, he hardly knew why, and almost awestruck, Bryan Armitage wrung the hand held out to him, and went away.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

It was nearly an hour later when North Branston left the hospital. Twilight had fallen before its time, and, as evening drew on, the gusts of rain had settled into a steady downpour. North's way home was by the Underground Railway, and by the time he reached the station which was his destination it was quite dark. The wind was blowing with piercing sharpness round the corner of the street, as he paused for a moment on the wet pavement, but he hardly seemed to notice it. He opened his umbrella and turned up his trousers mechanically, and strode away through the rain.

Five minutes' brisk walking brought him to his road. From some of the houses bright lights streamed out, making twinkling reflections in the puddles, and on the fast

falling raindrops as they struck up from the pavement. But in the house at which North Branston stopped either the lights within were few, or they were very jealously enclosed by blinds and curtains, for only from the pane of glass over the door did any light come forth into the night. North went rapidly through the gate and up the steps. He let himself in with a latchkey, and closed the door behind him.

The hall in which he stood, with the staircase beyond, and the dining-room half visible through an open door, were those of a commonplace, comfortable house, furnished well, but after the most uninteresting fashion. The most conspicuous characteristic about it was the intense stillness that prevailed. A heavy silence brooded everywhere. There was a dead oppression about the atmosphere, a total absence of all life and movement, which gave to the house a curious effect of being shut off from the outside world.

No suggestion of being affected by his surroundings touched North's face or manner as he drew off his great-coat. He was accustomed to them. He hesitated a moment, and then he went slowly upstairs. He stopped. He opened a door on the first landing and paused.

The room was a drawing-room, and it was in semi-darkness. Dark curtains had been drawn across the windows, the fire had died low in the grate, and the only light came from a small reading-lamp. The green shaded flame seemed to cast rather shadow than radiance, and in the sombre quiet which reigned here yet more intensely than it did elsewhere, the appearance of the room was indescribably gloomy. Lying on the sofa at the end of the room farthest from the door was Mrs. Vallotson.

She did not stir as the door opened. The lamp was close beside her, its rays fell full on her face, and North saw as he stood on the threshold, that she was asleep. The grave preoccupation of his face seemed to flash as though his thoughts had suddenly and unexpectedly been met half-way. He closed the door noiselessly, crossed the room with quick, quiet steps, and stood looking down at her intently.

Set and sullen, even in unconsciousness, with bitter compressed lines about the mouth, with that indefinable coarseness pervading every line, with stubborn rebellion stamped on every feature, the face that lay there in the light of the lamp was the face of the desperate woman who had

confronted North Branstion six months ago, hardened by every long day that had come and gone since then. No touch of perceptiveness, no touch of remorse, no touch of gentleness had fallen on those strong, harsh lines. But it was not with mental characteristics written or on her face that the eyes that watched her now were busy. A great and striking physical change had come upon Mrs. Vallotson during those same six months. The powerfully made figure, once so firm and matronly, had grown gaunt; even the hands, curiously rigid in her sleep, had an appearance of being all bone. Her face was sunken, and there was a pinched look about it which made her look twenty years older than her real age. Her colour was quite gone, and there was a singular grey look even about her lips.

She was sleeping very heavily—strangely heavily considering the light upon her face, considering also the close scrutiny which she was undergoing. The position was not the easy position most natural in sleep, there was something stiff and constrained about it, as though it had been adopted deliberately as affording some sort of unusual relief. And about her face there was a suggestion of physical exhaustion, such as might be produced by long-continued sleeplessness, or ceaseless pain.

North studied her face, glanced keenly at her position, and then stooped cautiously and listened to her breathing. At last he turned away, and went quietly out of the room, leaving her still sleeping.

An hour later the sound of the gong echoed through the quiet house, and North came into the drawing-room again. It was lighted up this time, but the cheerlessness of its appearance seemed to be rather accentuated than dissipated. It was empty when he entered; but a moment later there was a slow step on the stairs, and Mrs. Vallotson appeared.

Hard as her face had been in sleep, the contrast—now that she was awake—between its total immobility and the sombre fire that brooded in her sunken eyes, gave it the appearance of a mask cut in stone. No colour had come to her, and her lips were compressed. She wore a morning dress of heavy serge.

She made no answer, as North, coming towards her, wished her a quiet good evening; and he waited, as though her silence were a matter of course, while she preceded him out of the room and down to the dining-room.

Every morning and every evening did the mother and son sit facing one another on either side of the table; and as was the intercourse that now ensued, so was the intercourse between them from day to day. North talked, not plentifully, but with a grave, courteous perseverance which would not recognise the silence which met it. His manner to his mother was gentle and considerate; and both these qualities were rendered the more striking by the restraint which held back even his care for her from forcing itself upon her notice. He spoke entirely of impersonal matters; of such news as was to be found in the evening paper; of the weather, and so forth. He did not mention Bryan Armitage. He asked her no question of any kind.

Such replies as were absolutely necessary, if his speech was to have even the semblance of conversation, came from Mrs. Vallotson, monosyllabic, and indifferent. Her voice had acquired the peculiarly monotonous tone of a person who seldom speaks. She never originated a remark; she never looked at him. She sat for the most part with her eyes fixed steadily on her plate. The woman with whom household management had been a passion took not the faintest notice now either of the servants or of the dinner provided. The meal being over and dessert placed upon the table, she rose, and passed out of the room as silently as she had entered it.

North, having risen to open the door for her, did not return to his seat when he was alone. He walked up to the fireplace and stood there gazing down into the hot coals, reflecting, as it seemed, anxiously and uncertainly.

The subject of his cogitations was one which had been the background of all his thoughts for many days, and those few minutes during which he had watched his mother's sleep had brought it to a crisis. He moved abruptly at last, and went upstairs.

Mrs. Vallotson was sitting on a stiff, uncomfortable chair near the lamp. She had some needlework in her hand; needlework which, though North's masculine eyes were unaware of the fact, never advanced; and she did not lift her eyes as he entered the room. He sat down near her; but he did not, as he was wont to do, take up the paper which lay near his hand. As though he desired to arrest her attention, he fixed his eyes on her face with a deliberate directness of gaze which he usually avoided with her. Mrs. Vallotson's eyes, however, were fastened to her work, and her fingers

went on moving slowly and mechanically. And after a moment North spoke.

"Mother," he said, "do you not think it would be well for you to see a doctor?"

It was on very rare occasions only that he addressed her by the title which it was his right to give her. On his first word Mrs. Vallotson started and lifted her head, facing him with a fierce defiance and repulsion struggling with the rigidity of her expression. He spoke slowly, like a man who has weighed his words well, and as he finished a slight shock passed across her face. She looked at him for a moment in silence.

"No," she said sullenly. "Why should I?"

"Because you are not well," he said quietly.

A painful, half furtive consciousness, suppressed and thrust down, rose in her eyes; and her voice, as she answered, grated harshly.

"I don't know what you mean."

"I think you do," he said steadily. He was keenly observant of her. "You are in pain at this moment; you are in constant pain. I do not propose that you should let me treat you. But I should like you to see a friend of mine." He paused a moment, and then added very gravely and gently: "I should not suggest it if I did not think it—necessary."

She did not speak at once. The grey hue about her mouth deepened by a shade, and gradually there grew about her face something which gave it a singular coarse dignity. She took up her work again mechanically.

"Very well," she said.

"Will you see him to-morrow?"

"When you please."

"At what time?"

"I am always at home."

THE CENTRE OF THE WORLD.

WHERE is it? "At Charing Cross, of course," says the self-assured Londoner, and in one sense he may not be far wrong. "At Boston," says the cultured inhabitant of the "hub" of the universe. "Wherever I am," says the autocrat who essays to sway the destinies of nations. Well, we all know the story of the Head of the Table, and even if we did not know it, instinct would tell us where to look. But the centre of the world, in an actual, physical, racial, and mundanely-comprehen-

sive sense—where is it? We cannot answer the question so easily as did good old Herodotus, who scouted as absurd the idea of the earth being circular. "For my own part," says the Father of History—and of lies, according to some people—"I cannot but think it exceedingly ridiculous to hear some men talk of the circumference of the Earth, pretending without the smallest reason or probability that the ocean encompasses the Earth, that the Earth is round as if mechanically formed so, and that Asia is equal to Europe." He found no difficulty in describing the figure and size of such of the portions of the earth whose existence he recognised, but then he said "from India eastward the whole Earth is one vast desert, unknown and unexplored." And for long after Herodotus, the Mediterranean was regarded as the central sea of the world, and, in the time of Herodotus, Rhodes was accounted the centre of that centre.

It is very interesting, however, to trace how many centres the world has had within the range of written history. The old Egyptians placed it at Thebes, the Assyrians at Babylon, the Hindus at Mount Meru, the Jews at Jerusalem, and the Greeks at Olympus, until they moved it to Rhodes. There exists an old map in which the world is given a human figure, and the heart of that figure is Egypt. And there exists, or did exist, an old fountain in Sicily on which was this inscription: "I am in the centre of the garden; this garden is the centre of Sicily; and Sicily is the Centre of the whole Earth."

In that vast desert eastward of India, imagined by Herodotus, there is the country of China, which calls itself the Middle Kingdom, and the Emperor of which, in a letter to the King of England in this very century, announced that China is endowed by Heaven as the "flourishing and central Empire" of the world. And yet, once upon a time, according to some old Japanese writings, Japan was known as the Middle Kingdom; and the Persians claimed the same position for Persia; and, according to Professor Sayce, the old Chaldeans said that the centre of the earth was in the heart of the impenetrable forest of Eridu.

This forest, by the way, was also called the "holy house of the Gods," but it does not seem to have had anything to do with the Terrestrial Paradise, the exact location of which Mr. Baring-Gould has laboriously tried to identify through the legends of the nations. It is a curious fact that a ninth-

century map, in the Strasburg Library, places the Terrestrial Paradise—the Garden of Eden—in that part of Asia we now know as the Chinese Empire, and it is also so marked in a map found by Mr. Baring-Gould in the British Museum.

There is a twelfth-century map of the world at Cambridge, which shows Paradise on an island opposite the mouth of the Ganges. And in the story of Saint Brandan, the Saint reaches an island, somewhere "due east from Ireland," which was Paradise, and on which he met with a man who told him that a stream—which no living being might cross—flowing through the island, divided the world in twain. Another centre!

In an Icelandic story of the fourteenth century are related the marvellous adventures of one Eirek of Drontheim, who, determined to find out the Deathless Land, made his way to Constantinople. There he received a lesson in geography from the Emperor. The world, he was told, was precisely one hundred and eighty thousand stages, or about one million English miles, round, and is not propped up on posts, but is supported by the will of God. The distance between the Earth and Heaven, he was told, is one hundred thousand and forty-five miles, and round about the Earth is a big sea called the Ocean. "But what is to the south of the Earth?" asked the inquisitive Eirek. "Oh," replied the Emperor, "the end of the Earth is there, and it is called India." "And where shall I find the Deathless Land?" he enquired, and he was told that slightly to the east of India lies Paradise. Thereupon Eirek and a companion started across Syria, took ship and arrived at India, through which they journeyed on horseback till they came to a strait which separated them from a beautiful land. Eirek crossed over and found himself in Paradise, and, strange to say, an excellent cold luncheon waiting for him. It took him seven years to get home again, and, as he died soon after his return, the map of the route was lost.

Sir John Mandeville's description of the Terrestrial Paradise which he discovered, gives it as the highest place on the earth—so high that the waters of the Flood could not reach it. And in the very centre of the highest point is a well, he said, that casts out the four streams, Ganges, Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates, all sacred streams. Now in the "Encyclopædia of India" we learn that "The Hindus at Bikanir Rajputana

taught that the mountain Meru is in the centre surrounded by concentric circles of land and sea. Some Hindus regard Mount Meru as the North Pole. The astronomical views of the Puranas make the heavenly bodies turn round it." So here again we have a mountain as the terrestrial centre.

In the Avesta there is reference to a lofty mountain at the centre of the world from which all the mountains of the earth have grown, and the summit of which is the fountain of waters, whereby grow the two trees—the Heavenly Soma, and another which yields all the seeds that germinate on earth. From this fountain, according to the Buddhist tradition, flow four streams to the four points of the compass, each of them making a complete circuit in its descent. This mountain is the Navel of Waters where originated all matter, and where sits Yama under the Soma tree, just as in the Norse legend the Norns, or Fates, sit by the great central earth-tree, Yggdrasil.

According to the Greek tradition, Jupiter, in order to settle the true centre of the earth, sent out two eagles, one from east and one from west. They met on the spot on which was erected the Temple of Delphi, and a stone in the centre of that Temple was called the navel of the world. A gold eagle was placed on each side of this stone; the design is preserved in many examples of Greek sculpture, and the stone itself is mentioned in several of the Greek plays.

With reference to this, Mr. Lethaby in his "Architecture, Mysticism, and Myth," observes: "We may see in this myth of the centre-stone the result of the general direction of thought; as each people were certainly The People first born and best beloved of the gods, so their country occupied the centre of the world. It would be related how the oldest and most sacred city, or rather temple, was erected exactly on the navel. A story like this told of a temple would lead to the marking in the centre of its area the true middle point by a circular stone, a stone which would become most sacred and ceremonial in its import."

And Dr. Schliemann thus writes of a central circle he unearthed in the palace at Tiryns: "In the exact centre of the hall, and therefore within the square enclosed by the four pillars, there is found in the floor a circle of about 3·30 m. diameter. There can be little doubt that this circle indicates the position of the hearth in the centre of the megaron. The hearth was in

all antiquity the centre of the house, about which the family assembled, at which food was prepared, and where the guest received the place of honour. Hence it is frequently indicated by poets and philosophers as the navel or centre of the house. In the oldest time it was not only symbolically but actually the centre of the house, and especially of the *megaron*. It was only in later days, in the palaces of the great Romans, that it was removed from the chief rooms and established in a small by-room."

All which may be true enough, and yet the location of the hearthstone in the centre of the house may have had less reference to the earth-centre idea, than to the fact that in the circular huts of primitive man it was necessary to have a hole at the apex of the roof. Still it is interesting to note that, as in the Imperial palace at Constantinople, so on the floor of St. Peter's at Rome, and elsewhere, is a flat circular slab of porphyry, associated with all ceremonials.

We have seen the centre of the world placed in Europe, in Asia, and in Africa, but who would expect to find it in America many centuries ago? Yet the traditions of Peru have it that Cuzco was founded by the gods, and that its name signifies "navel"; and traditions of Mexico describe Yucatan as "the centre and foundation" of both heaven and earth. But let us go back to the East as the most likely quarter in which to find it, and as the quarter to which the eyes of man have been most consistently turned.

To successive generations of both Jews and Christians, Jerusalem has been the centre of the world, and the Temple the centre of Jerusalem. The Talmud gives directions to those who are in foreign countries to pray with their faces towards the sacred land; to those in Palestine to pray with their faces towards Jerusalem; to those in Jerusalem to pray with their faces towards the Mount; to those in the Temple to pray with their faces towards the Holy of Holies. Now this was not merely because this sacred spot was a ceremonial centre, but because it was regarded as the geographical centre of the earth. According to the Rabbis, the Temple was built on the great central rock of the world. It is written in the Talmud: "The world is like the eyeball of man: the white is the ocean that surrounds the wall, the black is the world itself, and the pupil is Jerusalem, and the image of the pupil is the Temple." And again: "The land of Israel is situated in the centre of the world,

and Jerusalem in the centre of the land of Israel, and the Temple in the centre of Jerusalem, and the Holy of Holies in the centre of the Temple, and the foundation stone on which the world was grounded is situated in front of the ark." And once more: "When the ark was removed a stone was there from the days of the first Prophets. It was called Foundation. It was three digits above the earth."

This claim is direct enough, and at Jerusalem to this day in the Dome of the Rock, supposed to occupy the site of Solomon's Temple, is a bare stone which, as Sir Charles Warren was assured, rests on the top of a palm-tree, from the roots of which issue all the rivers of the world. The Mohammedans have accepted this same stone as the foundation stone of the world, and they call it the Kibleh of Moses. It is said that Mahomet once intended making this the sacred centre of Islam, instead of Mecca, but changed his mind, and predicted that at the Last Day the black stone—the Kaabah—will leave Mecca and become the bride of the Foundation stone at Jerusalem, so that there can be no possible doubt of the centre of sacred influences.

Concerning the stone at Jerusalem, Professor Palmer says: "This Sakhrah is the centre of the world, and on the day of resurrection—it is supposed—the Angel Israfil will stand upon it to blow the last trumpet. It is also eighteen miles nearer Heaven than any other place in the world; and beneath it is the source of every drop of sweet water that flows on the face of the earth. It is supposed to be suspended miraculously between heaven and earth. The effect upon the spectators, however, was so startling, that it was found necessary to place a building round it and conceal the marvel." According to Hittite and Semitic traditions mentioned by Professors Sayce and Robertson Smith, there was a chasm in this central spot through which the waters of the Deluge escaped.

Right down to and through the Middle Ages Jerusalem was regarded by all Christians as the centre of the world. The Hereford map of the thirteenth century, says Mr. Lethaby, shows the world as a plane circle surrounded by ocean, round whose borders are the eaters of men, and the one-eyed and the half men, and those whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders. "Within this border we find everything the heart could desire; the sea is very red, the pillars of Hercules are pillars indeed;

there is the Terrestrial Paradise enclosed by a battlemented wall, and unicorns, manticores, salamanders, and other beasts of fascinating habits are clearly shown in the lands where they live. The centre of all is Jerusalem, a circular walled court, within which again is a smaller circle, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre."

Even when the earth was recognised as a sphere, the idea of Jerusalem being the centre was not given up. Dante held to it, and Sir John Mandeville endeavoured thus to explain away the difficulty. "In going from Scotland or from England towards Jerusalem, men go always upwards, for our land is in the low part of the earth towards the west; and the land of Prester John is in the low part of the world towards the east; and they have the day when we have the night, and on the contrary they have the night when we have the day; for the earth and sea are of a round form; and as men go upward towards one point they go downward to another. Also you have heard me say that Jerusalem is in the middle of the world; and that may be proved and shown there by a spear which is fixed in the earth at the hour of midday, when it is equinoctial, which gives no shadow on any side." Ingenious, if not convincing!

The Greek Church still regard Jerusalem as the middle of the world, and Mr. Curzon tells that in their portion of the Holy Sepulchre they have a magnificently decorated interior in the centre of which is a globe of black marble on a pedestal, under which, they say, the head of Adam was found, and which they declare to be the exact centre of the globe. The Mahomedans generally, however, regard the Kaabah at Mecca as—for the present, at any rate—the true centre. This stone is supposed to have been lowered directly from heaven, and all mosques are built to look towards it. Even in the modern schools of Cairo, according to Mr. Loftie, the children are taught that Mecca is the centre of the earth.

The Samaritans, however, look upon Gerizim as the holy mountain and centre of the religious and geographical world. The Babylonians regarded the great Temple of Bel, according to Professor Sayce, as the house of the Foundation Stone of Heaven and Earth. Gaya, again, is the Mecca of the Buddhists, where Buddha sat under the tree when he received enlightenment. This tree is the Bodhi tree described by Buddhist writers as surrounded by an enclosure rather of a parallelogram than of a square

shape, but with four gates opening to the four cardinal points. In the middle of the enclosure is the diamond throne which a voice told Buddha he would find under a Pipal tree, which diamond throne is believed to be of the same age as the earth. "It is the middle of the great Chiliocosm; it goes down to the limits of the golden wheel and upwards it is flush with the ground. It is composed of diamonds; in circuit it is a hundred paces or so. It is the place where the Buddhas attain the sacred path of Buddhahood. When the great earth is shaken this spot alone is unmoved. When the true law decays and dies it will be no longer visible." According to Sir Monier Williams, a stone marked with nine concentric circles is shown at Gaya as the diamond throne, and the Chiliocosm is not the centre of the world alone but of the Universe.

But in China, also a land of Buddhists, we find another centre, and in India there is an iron pillar at Delhi, dating from the fourth century, supposed by the Brahmins to mark the centre from their point of view. And in Southern India the Tamils have the Temple of Mandura, in the innermost sanctuary of which a rock comes through the floor, the roots of which are said to be in the centre of the earth.

The Indian Buddhists, of course, denied that China could be the Middle Kingdom, for the place where Buddha lived must necessarily be the centre. Nevertheless, the centre is now found by Chinese Buddhists in the Temple of Heaven at Peking, where is one circular stone in the centre of circles of marble terraces, on which the Emperor kneels surrounded by circles—including that of the horizon—and believes himself to be in the Centre of the Universe and inferior only to Heaven.

But in the sixth century a certain Chinese traveller, called Sung-Yun, went to India for Buddhist studies, and he made his way by the Pamirs, the water-shed of the great Asiatic rivers, Indus and Oxus. And of this country he wrote:

"After entering the Tsung Ling mountains, step by step, we crept upwards for four days, and reached the highest point of the range. From this point as a centre, looking downwards, it seemed just as though we were poised in mid-air. Men say that this is the middle point of heaven and earth."

This was written more than thirteen hundred years ago, and men to-day still call this part of Asia the Roof of the World.

DUST AND HYGIENE.

It is questionable whether, with all the attention paid in these days to the subject of hygiene, sufficient consideration is bestowed on the important part dust plays with respect to health. Yet dust is ever with us; with every breath we inhale more or less of it, and are exposed to many dangers from its penetration into our bodies.

Dust is to a large extent a product of human activity. In houses and workshops, on the highways, and in the streets, everywhere there is wear and tear of things, and the product is always dust. The wearing and cleansing of our clothing is continually breaking up its fibres into minute particles, and the friction of clothing on the skin carries away the scales of the epidermis, which are constantly being shed and renewed. Every contact of human feet, horses' hoofs, and the wheels of vehicles with paving and road materials wears away particles of iron and stone. The effects of the weather and the alternations of cold and heat disintegrate all exposed surfaces. To these particles which form the dust invariably present in dwellings, and in the streets, there must be added the innumerable minute cells of vegetable origin incessantly floating in the air, and on a complete view the dust produced by the disintegration of meteors by contact with our atmosphere must also be mentioned.

Dust accordingly consists of portions of all substances, organic and inorganic, which decay by natural processes, and are reduced to powder by any means whatever. Few of its constituents can be recognised by the naked eye. The microscope alone can detect the nature of many, and especially those of the greatest importance.

The organic constituents of dust come partly from the animal and partly from the vegetable kingdom. Besides these there are constituents of mixed nature proceeding from the smoke and waste of industrial works of all kinds.

The inorganic constituents of dust are made up of various salts, especially common salt; many metals, specially iron, lime, quartz, clay, magnesia, and many other compounds; while the smoke of various manufacturing processes adds products, often of poisonous nature, to the air. The principal part of the inorganic portions of dust arises from the decay and wear of the materials of which street pavements are made, and from the pulverisation of the surface of unpaved

roads. The harder and smoother the pavement surface the less is worn off it, and as these constituents of dust are specially disadvantageous to health, it is of great importance for a city to have its streets paved with as durable and smooth-surfaced materials as possible. Not easily worn are basaltic stones, granite, syenite, porphyry; but asphalted and macadamised streets, cement pavements, and more especially roads which are bare of solid covering, yield much dust.

Ehrenberg's investigations, published in 1847, are the first work of any importance in connection with the subject of dust. He subjected dust deposited on objects to close examination, but could only deal with its ruder elements, as the finer dust-particles do not readily settle and are blown away again by the lightest breath of air. Schroeter and Dusch, in 1857, filtered air through cotton wool, and observed the filtrate. Tyndall, 1867, improved on this method. Pasteur used gun-cotton as a filter, and dissolved it in ether, a method which has by far the best claim to exactitude. Air has also been drawn through distilled water, and the dissolved and undissolved substances examined, while more recently many other methods of investigation have been employed.

Tissandier found from his observations on the dust contents of the air in Paris that, after rain, a cubic metre of air contained six milligrammes of solid matter, which was increased nearly fourfold after long drought. In country air, with dry weather, he found three to four and a half milligrammes per metre of air, and in damp weather twenty-five. From twenty-five to thirty-four per cent. of this dust was combustible, and from seventy-five to sixty-six per cent. inorganic matter.

Fodor, of Budapest, after long examination of air at a height of five metres above the earth, found in autumn forty-three, in winter twenty-four, in spring thirty-five, and in summer fifty-five milligrammes of dust in each cubic metre of air as a daily average according to season.

Tichborne, in Dublin, found that street dust contained forty-five per cent. of organic matter and fifty-four inorganic. The air at forty metres' height contained nearly thirty parts of organic matters to seventy of inorganic.

Specially noteworthy is Aitken's method of investigating the dust contents of the air. He makes the individual dust particles visible by saturating the air to be examined

with water-vapour, and causing deposition of the moisture in very fine droplets, each of which contains a dust-particle as its nucleus, so that the number of droplets, counted by aid of a microscope, gives the numerical quantity of dust present in the particular sample of air under examination. Mr. Aitken has examined by his very ingenious apparatus the air of many places at all elevations. At a height of a thousand feet the number of dust-particles varied on different days from three thousand five hundred to twenty-five thousand per cubic centimetre of air. In the neighbourhood of Cannes, with wind from the mountains, the air contained one thousand five hundred and fifty dust grains, but with wind blowing from the city one hundred and fifty thousand. On the peak of the Rigi-Kulm, when enveloped in cloud, two hundred and ten only were found, but next day two thousand. At the top of the Eiffel Tower, with south wind and cloudy, stormy weather, the number was found subject to rapid alterations, sometimes being as low as two hundred and twenty-six, and again as high as one hundred and four thousand. In London the variation was quite as great.

The same investigator has also shown that the transparency of the air depends on the dust present in it. A relatively high amount of dust allows it to appear pretty transparent if it contains but little moisture, but as soon as the latter is present in more abundance, the circumference of the dust-particles increases, and the clearness of the atmosphere suffers. He has also found that the atmospheric dust begins to deposit the moisture of the air before it has been cooled to the dew point. With high atmospheric pressure, the dust-content is greater than with low pressures, as the abundance of dust depends on the strength of the wind. All the mists examined were found to have a great amount of dust present, and the thickness of the mist depends on the quantity of dust in the air. Hence cities have thicker mists than villages; indeed, the greater amount of dust in cities is the cause of the greater frequency of fogs.

Hygienic science now takes special account of the bacteria contained in the air. The certainty that all processes of decay in organic substances arise from the presence in the air of fructifying germs of minute forms of life, has led to the supposition that the air may also contain micro-organisms capable of producing disease, but attempts to attain to certainty on this

point were long unsuccessful, as the magnifying powers of the microscope were quite insufficient until within comparatively recent years. Ehrenberg, whose results were published in 1847, first succeeded in observing living germs with the microscope. Since then great progress has been made by various methods of investigation, of which a few may be briefly referred to.

Pasteur used a suction apparatus by which air was drawn through gun-cotton or asbestos. The germs contained in the air were entangled in the interstices of these filtering materials, which were then dissolved in ether, and the undissolved matters examined with the microscope, or brought into contact with germ-free nutritive substances suited for the development of micro-organisms, which soon showed themselves by the growth of more or less numerous "colonies," according to the number of the germs contained in the air examined. Miquel caused the air under examination to pass over glass plates smeared with glycerine, which was afterwards, with its contained germs, sown in bouillon. Koch exposed solid plates of transparent gelatine to the air, letting the deposited germs develop "in situ"—a method very convenient for observation, and adopted by most bacteriologists of the present day. Hesse drew air through tubes covered with gelatine on which the impurities were deposited. Petri sucked air by an air-pump through a sterilised sand filter which retained the germs, and gelatine being then mixed with the sand, they manifested their presence by development.

These and many other methods in use have for their object to provide for the germs which may be present in the air a suitable nursery and food materials in which they may develop under conditions permitting their life histories to be microscopically studied. The germs in the air grow and multiply; the inert matters have no effect, and are not taken account of.

It is certain that the germs of the lowest forms of plant life can only be carried into the air if they are surrounded by no fluid, and only dry air in motion can loose them and carry them abroad. Hence air in motion contains more of these than air relatively at rest. But it has also to be noted that a relatively very moist warm air preserves the germinating power of the germs, while dry warm air is disadvantageous to it. Accordingly with relatively high air temperature, and at the same time relatively abundant moisture, without preceding rain,

the number present is highest. Soon after and during rain it is lowest. The lower the temperature, the fewer the germs. In summer they are much more plentiful than in winter. It will be understood that the numbers present in the air for any particular place are essentially different according as the wind has passed over inhabited or uninhabited land before reaching it. The time of day has also an influence. More bacteria are present in the air in the morning than in the evening.

Near the earth's surface bacteria are more abundant than at some height above it, and the numbers decrease with elevation, but micro-organisms have been found at very considerable altitudes. City air is richer in germs than country air; sea air is almost entirely free from them; and the free atmosphere differs from the air in closed spaces. Rooms which are well ventilated and in good hygienic condition contain fewer than where the hygienic conditions are bad.

Of the micro-organisms found in the air, some are capable of causing the decay of organic matters, but are not known to be capable of producing diseases in man, while others are demonstrably disease-producing. The former, or non-pathogenous, are most largely represented, but of the pathogenous, or disease-producing, only one species has as yet been with certainty found. Welz found in the air of Freiburg twenty-three different species of micro-cocci, three of yeast-fungi, and twenty-two different species of bacilli. The single disease-producing bacterium which has yet been certainly found in the air with present methods of investigation, is regarded as the bacterium which causes suppuration, and is found present in many diseases and in many different organs. Its scientific appellation is "*Staphylococcus pyogenes aureus*." It consists of roundish cells which grow in clusters. It is extraordinarily resistant, and dryness especially does not hinder its development as with most other bacteria, which is perhaps the cause that it is almost always to be found in the air. According to Ullmann, in winter and in high regions it is present in smaller numbers than in summer and in the lower layers of the atmosphere. In the warm season it is six or eight times as numerous as in winter. In the open air generally it is much less abundant than in closed spaces, and hospital air contains it in greatest abundance.

Though the single one yet found with certainty in the air, we may confidently

assume that most of those bacteria which cause disease are present in dust. They may not yet have been distinguished there because the proper means and methods of cultivation suited for them have not yet been employed.

The injuries which dust causes are various. That which arises in the course of many industries is directly injurious to the workers—as, for instance, millers, stone-cutters, miners, iron-smelters, suffer by its inhalation. Dust in the air may directly or indirectly cause injury to our bodies both externally and internally. Its direct effects are mostly of a mechanical nature, while indirectly it is the medium by which disease-producing matters are introduced into the body where they develop, and so act, in a certain degree, as poisons.

Mechanically injurious are the inorganic constituents which by traffic are worn off from solid objects, such as the sharp-edged, sharp-pointed particles of street pavements, which easily penetrate the mucous membrane and originate disease. The coal dust issuing unconsumed from the chimneys of manufactories is similarly hurtful. The eye is especially exposed to injury from hard dust-particles floating in the air, which fall on the conjunctiva, become embedded in it, and unless speedily removed induce inflammation. Part of the penetrating dust is dissolved by the fluids of the eye, other blunt-edged grains are washed out and cause little trouble. Hard particles firmly wedged in may easily cause severer injuries, and the irritation set up favours the introduction of matters which cause infectious eye diseases.

The skin also suffers. Perspiration prevents the greater part from getting a foothold, but fungi find occasionally a favourable ground for development and cause skin diseases. The bacillus of suppuration may penetrate even the uninjured skin, giving rise to inflammatory processes, boils, abscesses, and so on, and originate disease even in the deeper tissues. The mucous lining of the breathing and digestive organs may be mechanically injured by the penetration of hard, sharp-edged dust-grains. Such effects are not in themselves of much importance, but they frequently open the door for the entrance of more serious disease-producing matters. The respiratory apparatus suffers especially in this respect, although provided with special means of resistance to the entrance of atmospheric impurities. But if the mucous lining is

not inviolate, and the epithelium weak in places in resistant power, foreign matters may obtain a lodgement and effect penetration, causing serious disturbances. Children are more easily affected than adults. The weather influences have to be reckoned with, for during dry winds diseases of the respiratory organs arise more readily than in rainy weather.

Common colds result from the activity of bacteria, which are also present in inflammation of the lungs. Tuberculosis is the consequence of the settlement and growth of tubercle bacilli, and it may well be assumed that dust is the carrier of these.

It is not too much to say that every man is constantly incorporating micro-organisms by breathing. These do not injure healthy lungs, but injured or unhealthy mucus receives and nourishes them. The perfectly sound man enjoys immunity from diseases which readily seize hold of the man whose system is disordered from any cause.

Besides diseases of the respiratory organs, dust also causes affections of the digestive organs. The micro-organisms floating in the air settle on the teeth, set up trouble there, and thence pass to the stomach and intestines. The great mortality of the first year of infancy is in great part due to the germs of organised beings in the dust of the air which affect the single nourishing fluid of children—milk—and make it injurious to health. Dust settles on all kinds of food; bacteria multiply on and are introduced into the body along with them. The worst results arise from dust falling into wounds, where the bacillus of suppuration finds most suitable nourishment for its rapid multiplication, speedily affecting not only the wound but the surrounding parts, and penetrating into the blood circulation causes the worst forms of general illness. The chief task of the present day treatment of wounds consists in preventing the bacteria of the air from obtaining a settlement on and in them.

An important problem of modern hygiene is the question of protection against this ever-present enemy, dust. As it is present wherever there is life and moving air, and no effective hindrance can be opposed to its origin, there remains nothing but as far as possible to render it innocuous on the spot, and further to remove it out of our immediate neighbourhood.

If dwellings are to gain in salubrity they must be cleansed much more carefully than is usually done, especially with the poorer

classes. They are, it is true, daily or almost daily cleaned and swept, besides being occasionally damp-wiped or sprinkled, but all this is done but superficially at the best. Dust is removed from the more prominent articles by dry "dusting"; floors are swept dry—moisture would injure the furniture. The coarsest elements of the dust are, by this perfunctory housemaid's process, certainly removed from houses, but the finer, and just the most dangerous, are merely whirled up into the air, to settle again in places not daily accessible, accumulate there, and remain until a "big cleaning," to be then either entirely removed, or perhaps in many cases only once more whirled up.

The carpets, curtains, and various hangings of modern houses provide favourite resting-places for dust, and in the generally superficial methods of cleaning employed, only very seldom are those conditions fulfilled which must be observed if due regard is to be paid to the hygiene of dwellings in this respect. These are: daily airing of rooms—how many men would rather sit in a chemically impure and dusty atmosphere than expose themselves, even for a moment, to a harmless draught?—further, damp wiping of all furniture and other articles, and cleansing of floors with the help of water. Quite especial care must be taken in cleansing sick-rooms. Those in attendance on a sick person are seldom aware that by unsuitable methods of cleaning they frequently cause much injury to the patient, and perhaps aid in spreading the disease.

But even should the purification of dwellings be most carefully carried out, there remains the disposal of the refuse. Instead of being burned on the spot and so made harmless, it is put into open vessels and from these transferred to dust-bins without regard to the wind, which carries a great part of the finest dust into the air when the vessels are being shaken out. This manœuvre is repeated when the dust-bins are emptied into open waggons which then wend their way through the public streets, while every gust of wind wafts away a portion of their contents and carries them again into the houses and the persons of the inhabitants. Authorities declare the whole system to be directly injurious, and urge the universal adoption in houses of closed portable vessels, the contents of which should be removed at least twice a week by the public cleansing staff, but only in carts provided with moveable iron covers. Moisture should be liberally

employed, so that during the entire course of removal the refuse may be kept damp, and thereby prevented from being scattered abroad by wind.

These precautions are still more necessary with regard to the cleansing of the streets, by which, in many cases, offences of the gravest kind are committed against the most elementary rules of health. Street refuse amounts to a very great quantity. It has been reckoned to amount, for a town of one hundred thousand inhabitants, to thirty-five or forty tons a day in dry weather, and to one hundred or even one hundred and eighty tons a day in wet weather. On an average, in streets with the greatest traffic five or six waggon-loads of street mud are formed daily on each mile. In many cities much is done, in many little, but nowhere enough to remove this. The transport business is mostly left to the rain and winds, both of which work much mischief. Rain carries a considerable proportion of street impurities into the sewers; a greater part sinks with the rain into the ground and impregnates it with filth, and often thereby contaminates the drinking water. In well-paved cities this is less the case than where the pavement is imperfect, with irregularities in whose hollows rain water collects, and with its richness in organic matters, especially bacteria, slowly soaks into the ground. When the wind takes up the business of removal only a very small part is carried beyond the city bounds, most is carried into the houses, and dwelling-rooms, and the lungs of the people.

To avoid these unpleasantnesses it is requisite that the cleaning should be undertaken more frequently than is generally done. Air in movement only carries abroad bacteria when these and the matters in and on which they are found are relatively dry. To prevent the drying and reduction to dust of such waste matters, attempts have been made in many places to keep the streets moist by the use of hygroscopic materials. The results were generally favourable, but on a large scale such a process is inadmissible on account of the great cost. It might be used with advantage during times of severe epidemics, with the addition of disinfectants.

The most easily available and cheapest means of cleaning streets are always water and the besom—especially the revolving brush of street-sweeping machines. With both together, on a sufficient scale, with abundance of water and plenty of hands,

the best possible would be done. But it must be confessed that even in cities such measures are either not adopted at all, or are employed on an entirely insufficient scale. In small towns it is the business of the people themselves; in large towns the municipal authorities take it in hand. Ignorance and carelessness on the part of the former, want of sufficient funds on the part of the latter, prevent proper efficiency. Watering, when it is done, is insufficient, there are too few sweepers, and the whole is but superficially performed. Even the best intentioned municipal regulations fall short, and even these are not fully carried out. In hot weather, when the necessity is greatest, water is so sparingly sprinkled by the passing water-cart that it has dried up before the sweeper comes on the ground, with the result that the work is almost worse than useless.

The cost of town and city cleansing can hardly mount too high. There is no better expenditure of public funds, nor one more directly beneficial to the people, than the prevention of sickness, for sickness costs much money.

THE STRANGE RESULTS OF A STRANGE WAGER.

I.

As Mr. Dan Driscoll from Skibbereen was strolling along Dame Street, Dublin, one afternoon, he encountered a remarkable-looking individual in a blue coat and buckskin breeches.

"Hillo, Whalley! Is that you?" he cried. "Where are you bound for?"

"Is it me?" was the reply. "Faix, thin, it's nobody else. An' I'm bound for the House. Grattan's goin' to spake agin the Government."

"Nonsense, man. This isn't a Government night at all. There's nobody there but a lot of noodles not worth listening to. Come round with me to the Phaynix for dinner. Tom Macnamara and some other jolly fellows will be there, and we're sure to have some good fun."

"All right, my boy, I'm game for a spree any day," responded the gentleman in blue, and off the pair of "bucks" went to the club which Mr. Driscoll facetiously denominated the "Phaynix."

"Bucks" and "bloods" were so called from the smartness of their apparel, and the way in which they attempted to ape the fine gentleman. Some of them, indeed, belonged to families of distinction, who

generally looked upon their wild freaks with a lenient eye. These young fellows were dashing, reckless, liberal of their means—when they had any—and always seeking fresh outlets for their happy superabundance of animal spirits. In Dublin, during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, their antics furnished the hilarious society of that gay metropolis with perennial food for mirth.

Buck Whalley—like most Irishmen—could trace his descent from a princely family. Unfortunately, his branch of it had fallen upon evil days, and his early education had been much neglected. However, he was possessed of a strong constitution, which the athletic exercises of his country—leaping, running, wrestling, and playing with the cudgel—had developed and hardened. Probably these pastimes were more congenial to him than the pursuit of literature, of which, it is no injustice to say, he knew nothing whatever.

But there was a latent ambition in the young man's breast that ultimately brought him fame. Moreover, by a sudden change of fortune he became possessed of ample means, which he determined to spend in a manner worthy of an Irishman and a Whalley.

He immediately appeared among the "young bloods" of Dublin, and speedily gained admittance to many of the fashionable clubs, whose members were delighted to have a new sensation. Nobody could deny that he was a buck of the first head. His remarkable garments, his primitive manners, the easy assurance of his ignorance, his rustic humour, his innocence of the fashionable world, all conspired to make him attractive to the sportive gentry of the Irish capital. He was "outré," "bizarre," extraordinary; they found him a source of endless amusement, and by unanimous consent he was dubbed "Buck Whalley," having beyond all doubt proved his claim to that proud title.

In those days, as in ours, betting was a mania among certain classes. Football was not so popular as it is now; but men took the odds on horses and dogs and cocks and pugilists, on elections and duels and drinking bouts, and on every event of the day or of the night. The celebrated Beau Nash won fifty pounds by doing penance in a blanket at the door of York Minster while the people were coming out of church. He gained a still larger sum by riding naked on a cow through a country village. Oliver Goldsmith speaks of high-bred

women staking fortune, beauty, health, and reputation at the card table. He tells a story of one old lady who was so very ill that she was given over by the physician. Conscious of her condition, she sent for the curate, not to administer ghostly consolation, but to play at cards with her to pass the time! Having won all her adversary's money, she proposed playing for her funeral charges; but alas! the poor lady expired just as she had made her game.

The party at the "Phaynix" naturally grew merry over their dinner and their wine. Politics and sport were vivaciously discussed, and a great deal of ingenuity was wasted in discovering new subjects for a wager.

"I'll bet two to one that George Robert Fitzgerald will fight another duel before the week is out," said Dan Driscoll.

"I'll bet twenty to one that George Robert will never die a natural death," exclaimed Dick Fallows.

"I'll lay anybody a ten-pound note that Jimmy Moffatt's game cock will make mincemeat of Denis O'Brien's bird next Saturday," remarked Ned Lysaght.

"Pooh!" ejaculated Tom Macnamara, a young squireen from County Galway; "can none of you do better than that? Listen to me, now, here's something more out of the common. Whalley, I'll bet you a hundred guineas you don't go to Jerusalem!"

"Done!" cried our hero, who made a point of never refusing a bet.

The news of the wager was soon all over the town. It created a greater sensation than one of Grattan's speeches or Curran's jokes. Would Whalley attempt the journey? That was the question on all lips. Some who were getting tired of him hoped he would; no more appropriate way of having him extinguished could have been devised. Others thought that when the rash buck realised the difficulties of the task he had undertaken, he would hand over the hundred guineas and quietly subside under the storm of ridicule which the wits were already preparing.

II.

MR. WHALLEY'S acquaintance with geography was strictly limited. He had never travelled beyond the confines of his own favoured island, and

Knowledge before his eyes her ample page,
Rich with the spoils of time, did ne'er unroll.

True, he had heard of Jerusalem on some of the rare occasions when he attended church. It was somewhere in the Holy

Land; the inhabitants were Jews, and Jews he had found both extremely useful and really friendly under certain circumstances. So when somebody remonstrated with him on his proposed mad escapade, he answered sententially:

"A man who has plinty of money can go annywhere, and do annything."

It was homely philosophy; but, as events have often proved, it was founded on a substratum of fact.

Whalley was completely ignorant of foreign travel and foreign languages. In his case ignorance was certainly bliss. With a light heart, a stout stick, and a long purse, he set out on his pilgrimage to Palestine. After paying a short visit to London, he arrived safely in Paris, where his eccentricity and lavish expenditure soon brought him notoriety if not fame. The horrors of the great Revolution that was about to shake the thrones of Europe had not yet burst upon the gay city; many natives of the Green Isle were to be found among its brilliant society, and they gave their comical countryman a genuine Irish welcome. Dan Driscoll happened to be there at the time; and Dan introduced the traveller to some of the Parisian "salons," in which Mr. Whalley was the observed of all observers, if not exactly the glass of fashion. But the attractions and festivities of that delightful capital could not detain him: he soon grew anxious to start again on his pilgrimage.

"Look here, Whalley," said Dan Driscoll, "you're taking this thing too seriously. Why don't you stay awhile, and enjoy yourself among these charming French, instead of running off on a wildgoose chase from which you will probably never return?"

"I like the Mossoos very well," returned Whalley, "but I'm determined to win my bet."

"Oh, never mind the bet—there was no time fixed—you can put it off till Doomsday."

"It's very kind of you, Driscoll," said the other firmly, "but I'm goin'. I've made up my mind."

And go he did. From Paris he proceeded by slow stages to Marseilles. Here he took passage on board a ship bound for the Levant. Our space is too limited to recount the perils and remarkable adventures that befell him upon the voyage. Suffice it to say that, after encountering many storms and delays, Greek cut-throats and Algerine pirates, he eventually crossed the reefs at Jaffa, and landed on the shores of Syria.

III.

IN Jaffa, Whalley fell in with an old Benedictine monk, who, thinking the traveller was performing a religious vow, kindly took charge of his effects, and gave him some valuable advice in broken English. The good brother endeavoured to make the pilgrim understand that his dress was unsuitable for the East, and that walking was a very difficult mode of progression; but Whalley declared that "what was good enough for Dublin was good enough for anny place," and stoutly maintained his intention of "goin' to Jerusalem on his own two feet;" and with this valiant resolution he started out of Jaffa.

In those days Cook's tours were yet in the dim and distant courses of the future. Western travellers in Asia Minor were few and far between, and Mr. Whalley's appearance was such as would astonish any respectable Mussulman even at the present day. He was dressed up as became the most exalted of Dublin bucks. A small hat jauntily cocked on one side of his head; a long, blue, swallow-tailed coat, adorned with brass buttons of prodigious size; a brilliant waistcoat that displayed half the colours of the rainbow; buckskin breeches and top-boots; and a stout shillelagh which he flourished over his head with great vigour; all combined to make him appear one of the most extraordinary figures that had ever amazed a true believer; while his queer antics, and his strange language, which no dragoman could interpret, added the charm of mystery to this original pilgrim.

"It's mighty hot thravellin' in this counthry," said the pilgrim to himself, at the same time mopping his head with a big red handkerchief—"more betoken, there's not even a decent pub where a man can slake his thirst. I'm afear'd I've lost the road—if there is anny road at all in this outlandish place. Howaniver, I'll ax wan of thim brown, skinny fellows in that dirty village over there."

As he entered the "dirty village," he met a Bedouin family coming out. Beside his donkey walked the father, with a gun slung across his body, and a long reed spear in his hand. A couple of women were seated in a little tent on the donkey's back, one on each side to balance; while two active boys trotted at the father's side.

Mr. Whalley addressed the old gentleman politely. "The top of the mornin' to ya. Can you tell me the way to Jerusalem?"

Mustapha gazed at him in wonder, shook his head, and muttered something in Arabic. To which the pilgrim responded with another query, accompanied by many odd gesticulations; whereat the two boys burst into uncontrollable laughter, being joined therein by several others who had just come up.

Their irreverent levity, added to Mustapha's stolidity and the heat of the day, disturbed Whalley's usual good humour, which was now completely overcome by the conduct of the donkey. That intelligent animal had been investigating the stranger with great interest, and at this stage of the interview coolly proceeded to munch the skirts of the valuable blue coat! This ungentlemanly conduct was promptly resented by the irate Hibernian, who bestowed with his cudgel a sounding thwack on Neddy's ribs.

Now an Eastern donkey is a more aristocratic beast than his down-trodden British brother. He mixes on equal terms with his owner's family, and is regarded as a friend and kinsman by all its members. Naturally, therefore, Mustapha was wroth at the indignity offered to his four-footed companion, and by way of protest suddenly made a wicked thrust at the aggressor with his long spear.

Whalley was not caught napping. With a stroke from his faithful blackthorn he sent the spear flying, and quickly delivered a true Donnybrook whack on the spearman's pate, observing genially:

"Och, shillelagh! ye niver missed fire!"

Immediately there arose a great hubbub. The crowd closed in upon the Irishman, he was borne to earth, speedily bound in spite of his violent struggles, and carried before the Cadi, foaming with rage at his captors.

IV.

ALI BEN YUSEF, the Cadi, was a venerable personage, with a large turban, a long white beard, and a pair of piercing eyes that were singularly bright for a man of his years. He listened patiently to the accuser's story, and then, turning to the accused, spoke a few words, of course in Arabic.

"Bedad," said the prisoner, "you don't luk at all bad for an ould haythen. But I don't understan' a word ye say."

Ali Ben Yusef again addressed him.

"I tell ye," cried Whalley impatiently, "I don't know what ye say at all at all. I only wish I could inseinse ye into the way thim vagabones over there behaved, the thaves of the worl'."

What was Mr. Whalley's astonishment to hear the Cadi reply gravely in a rich, mellifluous Tipperary brogue:

"Arrah, bad scan to ye, ye big bosthoon! What do ye mane by comin' here wid yer onmannerly monkey thricks to annoy dacent, quiet people, ye thunderin' spalpeen?"

"Eh? What? How——?" ejaculated the astounded pilgrim. "Holy Saint Denis! What's this at all?"

"Why don't ye behave yersilf, ye great omadhaun?" continued Ali in the same grave tones. "What are ye doin' here, batin' honest men's donkeys with yer murderin' club?"

"Sure, I was on my way peaceably to Jerusalem, when that ill-bred baste of an ass begun to ate me up, an' I only protisted agin him wid my stick."

"Well," said Ali, "if I get you off will ye promise to conduct yersilf properly? I like yer brogue—it's swate to my ears afther such a long fast—an' I want to have a colloque wid ye."

"I'll promise annything," returned the prisoner, "if ye'll only give me a dhrink of could wather—especially if there's a taste of Cork whisky at the bottom of it."

Thus assured, the Cadi again turned to the Arabs, who were listening in their stoical way to this curious colloquy, of which they understood nothing save the varying expression on the prisoner's face. However, the altered demeanour of the combative Hibernian convinced them that their magistrate was a man of profound wisdom.

"O true believers!" said he, "Allah is great, and Mohammed is His prophet! This man is a gentile dervish from beyond the great sea, who has taken upon himself a vow to visit Jerusalem. Allah has seen fit to afflict him—to deprive him of reason—he is mad, my brethren, stark mad, and so deserves our pity. Let us treat him with the consideration due to his state of sorrow. I will entertain him to-night; and do you, brethren, help him on his painful way to-morrow."

Of course Whalley could not understand the drift of these remarks; but he saw the look of anger gradually melt into an expression of pity and even respect, as the people unbound him, handed him his shillelagh, and quietly dispersed; and he also was deeply impressed with the Cadi's wisdom.

That functionary's hospitality was equal to his wisdom. He took the stranger to his residence, furnished him with food and

water, and when they were seated on the divan, smoking and drinking coffee, he observed:

"What's yer name?"

"Whalley—they call me Buck Whalley in Dublin."

"Ha, Dublin! Do you know Skinner's Alley there?"

"I do, well."

"Is there a little fish shop in it kep' by wan Mrs. Muldoon?"

"Arrah, is it ould Biddy Muldoon ye mane?"

"Ould?" said the Cadi quickly. Then after a pause, he added: "Ay, well, of coorse she must be gettin' ould now, the crathur. I was forgettin' that 'tis thirty years since I saw her."

"How on earth do ye know Biddy Muldoon?" said the pilgrim.

"How do I know her, is it? Why, man alive, I'm her son, Pat Muldoon, that run away to say in the 'Betsy Jane' thirty years ago!"

"Whew!" ejaculated Whalley, surveying the other dubiously. "This bangs Banagher! Sure she tould me herself Patsy was only a wee boy of twelve at the time, an' you're an ould man of seventy at last!"

The Cadi chuckled.

"You're a man of the world, Whalley," he said, "an' you know you can't always believe yer eyes. A chemist that I sarved in Italy larned me the saycret of turning my hair an' beard as white as snow, or as black as a coal."

"Well, it bates all," rejoined the guest. "But now that I think of it, Biddy believes that you're still alive. She gets a bit of money from abroad now an' agin, an' she declares it comes from her own wee bouchal, Patsy."

"Glory be to Heaven for that same!" murmured the Cadi, piously crossing himself. Then with a smile at his own lapse, he continued: "Allah is great! Come, tell me how the poor crathur is gettin' on. It's mate an' dhrink to me to meet a boy from the old sod wanst more."

With true Eastern hospitality the Cadi entertained his guest for three days, and then sent him on his way refreshed and strengthened.

On bidding him farewell, Whalley asked:

"Is there anny service I can do you in return for your kindness, Muldoon?"

"Two," answered the Cadi. "First, never mention to annybody but my mother that you have seen me; and second, don't

let the poor ould crathur want for a shillin' or two."

"Niver fear that," responded Whalley, wringing his hand.

And so they parted.

The invisible telegraph that carries news in the desert had anticipated the pilgrim's journey. Lunatics have a sacred character in the eyes of most of the Eastern peoples, even to this day; so the traveller was received everywhere along his route with kindness and respect. He passed through Ramleh, on through the gorge Ali, and the village of Abu Gosh, and at length arrived safely in the Holy City.

The "street of David" was crowded with a seething mass of humanity. There were Christian Syrians in that queer garment, half pantaloons, half petticoat; Jews with battered black hats, Jews with shaven heads, and Jews with ringlets; merchants in silk and velvet, and shopkeepers ragged, patched, and motley; wild Bedouins from the desert, in their striped burnouses, Turkish soldiers in their dirty blue; and an occasional Russian pilgrim in long caftan, fur cap, and high boots. But perhaps the most remarkable figure of all was that of the Dublin buck in his blue coat and flowered vest,

Whose form had not yet lost
All its original brightness.

However, his formidable cudgel, which he flourished about his head with playful vigour, together with the reputation that had preceded him, kept the curious at a respectful distance.

In Jerusalem he found an interpreter who understood English, and by his aid procured a certificate from the authorities that he had actually visited the city. With this in his pocket he remained a few days to see the sights, and then disappeared as suddenly as he had arrived.

v.

FOUR years have passed. Tom Macnamara is at the "Phaynix" with some of his cronies. Their money is exhausted, and they are growing unusually sentimental.

"Boys," says Tom, "what changes a short time brings about. Why, I believe I'm the only one left of the company that used to meet here three or four years ago."

"Ah, poor Dan Driscoll!" says another. "I heard he was guillotined by that monster, Robespierre."

"So he was," declares a third, "and by the same token his friend, Dick Fallows, broke his neck hunting on the Curragh."

"Then there was Buck Whalley," says Tom. "He wasn't a bad sort, but he had no gumption. You know he started for Jerusalem. Well, I believe he was captured by a Barbary corsair and taken to Algiers, where the Dey petted him until he found the festive Whalley trying to bolt with his favourite wife. Then the poor fellow was sold to an Arab slave dealer, and carried off in chains to Timbuctoo; and I daresay he is flogged to death by this time. I'm sorry; though it saves me a hundred guineas—if I only had them!"

"Allow me to inform you," says a person at the door who has just heard this speech, "allow me to inform you, Thomas Macnamara, Esquire, of the County Galway, that Buck Whalley is not flogged to death, an' that you haven't saved yer hundred guineas, for I'm here to claim the money on the blissid spot!"

And sure enough there he was, blue coat, brass buttons, flowered waistcoat, top-boots, blackthorn, and all! Tom was impecunious; there was no cash. But what of that! The good-natured buck had won fame and glory, and the base consideration of filthy lucre was altogether beneath his notice in the exuberance of his triumph.

The subsequent career of the adventurous pilgrim is soon told. His cognomen was promptly and unanimously changed; instead of Buck Whalley he was styled Jerusalem Whalley—a title he accepted with great pride. He resorted to London; paid another visit to Paris during the Peace of Amiens; spent his money freely; and dissipated his fortune in gaming, drinking, and riotous living. Returning to his native country, he retired to poverty and obscurity, and, deserted by his boon companions, was finally gathered to his fathers; but the story of his great wager survived in clubs, and coffee-houses, and drawing-rooms, for many years after its hero had been laid to rest in a nameless grave.

RICHENDA.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "*The Thirteenth Brydala*," "*Catherine Maitment's Burden*," "*Benefit of Clergy*," "*The Vicar's Aunt*," etc. etc.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was eleven o'clock on a hot August morning. So hot was the air that it seemed to dance and vibrate in visible heat-waves over the streets and roofs of London. There is something about the heat of an August day distinctly different from that of

any other hot day in any other earlier month. June days may be scorching; the July sun may pour mercilessly down on houses and people; but the heat of August contains something far more oppressive still. There is a dryness and parchedness in the air in August which is not present earlier. It is as if the air had done all that was possible during the summer to fulfil its mission of sheltering the earth from the fiercest heat of the sun; and becoming itself at length permeated through and through with the rays it can no longer screen, is in its own turn a source of heat.

In London this characteristic of the August air is added to by the refraction from burning house-fronts, dazzling pavements, and shimmering roofs. And the air, intensely oppressive in the country and the cornfields, is stifling in the streets.

There was on this particular August morning no hotter spot in the whole expanse of London, than a small red-brick villa in a dreary half-built street belonging to an outlying suburb. The suburb itself was not new; it had been long known as a commonplace, cheap, respectable part of London; but the street in question, and some half-dozen neighbouring ones, had lately undergone a reformation—a pulling down and a building up at the hands of a person or persons who had re-christened this special section of the old suburb by a more distinguished name. They had abjured its old friend's shelter, and borrowed a name from a more aristocratic locality to which it certainly, even with one of the points of the compass prefixed to it, had no real claim.

The red villa was characteristic of the spirit that had animated these proceedings. It had an imposing iron railing, heavy enough to guard extensive grounds, to enclose its insignificant strip of front garden; and the massive gate in this railing opened on to a flight of steps ending in a portico that seemed to be all white floriated stucco capitals. Inside the heavy door the scheme was just the same. An entrance-hall, much too large for the size of the house, afforded a place whence to survey two doors opening into the smallest of dining and drawing-rooms, one behind the other. In this special red-brick villa the drawing-room was the back one of the two rooms. It was furnished in harmony with the house. There was a fire-screen of some wonderful design in the grate, a chromo-lithograph or so on the walls, and four chairs and a sofa covered in cretonne so worn and faded that

the dim old carpet on which it stood looked quite respectable by comparison. The window faced a square of back garden containing a broken trellis, some struggling geraniums, and one sapling plane. Its yellow blind was drawn half down to keep out the sun, which was glaring mercilessly down on the back garden; and beside the window, playing aimlessly with the blind-tassel, and staring out at the same time into the untidy, scorching square of garden, stood Richenda Leicester, alone.

It was a fortnight since she had left Mrs. Fitzgerald's house, and she had spent the fortnight in this red-brick villa. It was the home of Bessie Langton, the girl whom Richenda had expected to meet at the New Gallery. Miss Langton, on hearing that Richenda was going away from Bryanston Street, had at once, with ready kindness, asked her to come and stay with her "for a few days, to think things over." Richenda had accepted the invitation very gratefully, and for all of the past fortnight she had been engaged in "thinking things over."

To judge from the expression of her face, the occupation had not been very satisfactory in any way. She was looking harassed, and not at all happy. Her cheeks were very pale, and her pretty mouth was compressed, while her beautiful eyes were troubled and anxious. The anxiety was not at all unnatural; for not even all the thinking she had bestowed could make the "things" she was turning over easy to arrange.

She had left Mrs. Fitzgerald with a sort of slur upon her name. Perhaps that is rather a strong word to use; but the facts were these: Mrs. Fitzgerald, after furiously declaring at first that she should tell every one who asked her that Richenda had left her in disgrace, softened down somewhat as the days went on, and said, more moderately, that she would always be willing to give her testimonials as an excellent children's nurse, but that her private conduct she must say, if asked, had been far from satisfactory. Of course, though it sounded milder, this was tantamount to giving her no testimonials at all, Richenda knew; and she went her way on the day she left with a heavy heart enough, and a sore and bitter one too. She went first to report herself at the Institution which had trained her, and to ask for help in getting more work. She told her own tale, simply and concisely; and she was, as she had hoped to be, believed as to its main outline. But she received a long and careful

warning to be more discreet and generally more tactful in her life, and the warning was ended by the statement that this first failure would be a great and serious drawback to her for the immediate future. And though she got the promise of every possible help, it was tinged with the same shadow of doubtfulness as to its accomplishment, and poor Richenda had left the Institution for Bessie Langton's home in a very sombre frame of mind.

Her stay in the red-brick villa had brought nothing to lighten her care, as yet. She had wasted no time; she had tried at once, in every one of the quarters that were open to her, to hear of fresh work, but nothing had presented itself. It was a "bad time of year," she was assured, with a unanimous conviction that was not needed to impress the fact on her sinking spirits; she had been discovered to be "too young" on the only occasion on which she had had the least hope of success; and her letters to the very few friends who might have helped her had received scarcely any answers.

And on this hot morning poor Richenda was feeling downcast indeed. The crowning point of her anxious distress lay in the feeling that she could not any longer stay where she was. The Langtons were as kind as any people could have been, but they were almost as poor as Richenda herself, and she knew well that their scanty resources were not calculated to bear the burden of an extra member in the household. She had, literally, nowhere to go, and nothing to do.

She had turned over the whole position in her mind almost as many times, during the half-hour that she had been standing at the drawing-room window, as she had turned over the tassel in her fingers. She dropped it wearily at last, with a heavy sigh, and, stretching up both hands on the ledge of the window, let her face fall on to the backs of her hands.

Suddenly the silence in that dull, hot drawing-room was broken by almost the only sound that ever did break the monotony of the daily life in the red-brick villa—the postman's knock. Richenda heard it, and raised her face slowly from her hands. There were two great tears in the beautiful eyes, but Richenda brushed them hastily away, and, turning, went slowly out of the drawing-room to see if there were any letters for her. Of letters about any work she almost despaired, with the complete despair which belongs to youth.

fulness of heart. Nevertheless, she might as well see what had come, she told herself now, as she had told herself every time she had heard the same sound through all the past days. If there were no other letters, she said, as she entered the ill-proportioned hall, there might be letters for her from her brothers.

It was very foolish of her, and she knew it well, but she had not been able to bring herself to tell them yet that she had gone away from Mrs. Fitzgerald's house. She had hoped, at first, that she might get something else to do quickly enough to make it unnecessary to tell them what would make Jack, at all events, as unhappy for her as she was for herself. And day by day, as her hope failed, the courage necessary to give the news to the hearts she loved best had failed too. Twice their letters had been sent on from Mrs. Fitzgerald's house to her, and she expected to have from the younger boys a letter thus sent on this morning.

Just as she reached the front door, the dining-room door opened, and Mr. Langton, the master of the poor little red brick villa and its belongings, came out into the hall. He was a little bent, shrunken man of sixty or so. He had "retired," because of ill-health, on a tiny pension two years before, from a clerkship of some sort, and, in spite of his inability to perform it, he found his days long and monotonous without their routine. The postman's knock was as much an event of importance to him as it was to the anxious Richenda.

He was very fond, in a tremulous, fatherly fashion, of his daughter's pretty guest and friend. Richenda had been pleasant and gentle to the poor, uninteresting old man, and he repaid it with the keenest appreciation.

"Looking for your letters, my dear?" he said now cheerfully, as Richenda stooped to pick up a little scattered heap lying on the ground. "I hope they'll bring you luck, I'm sure. Any for me?" he added, with the doubtful air of a person who does not in the least really expect any.

Richenda glanced through those she had taken up and handed him two. His pleasure seemed in no way affected by the fact that they were only circulars, and he tottered happily back with them into the dining-room. Meanwhile, Richenda walked slowly back towards the drawing-room with hers.

They were three. One address was in a straggling handwriting, which seemed to

be the joint efforts of the twins; one was in a girlish hand; and the third, which she had scarcely noticed as she crumpled the last two up in her hand, was a little long-shaped business envelope which held a neat clerkly address.

She had opened the boys' letter to her at once, and as she crossed the hall her eyes had eagerly scanned the loving, straggling sentences on its first page. She absently opened the drawing-room door with one hand, and shut it again behind her while she turned the letter eagerly over in her other hand. She betook herself to her old place by the window mechanically, and standing there she went through the boyish letter to its end, dwelling with eager content on the sentences which implied that the twins were happy, in spite of one or two references to "when we live with you, Richie," which made her bite her lips fiercely to keep the tears of vexation and distress out of her eyes.

She folded it again at length and laid it on the window-sill beside her, with a sudden remembrance of her other letters. They were still crushed in her hand, and she straightened and unfolded them. They were not exciting to look at in any way, and Richenda's tired mind had come to that stage in which every fresh disappointment is a fresh blow. And she shrank now from opening strange letters, from a heavy foreboding of what their contents would assuredly be. However, she took the one in the girlish handwriting and opened it with an effort. It was from a girl she had known in her old home. She was coming to London for a day or two, and she asked if Richenda could meet her and help her with some shopping. "If you are not too busy, now you're at work," the writer said. "I don't really expect for one moment you will have time to come out with me." Richenda read to the end of the little note, and then laid it down on the window-sill beside the other with a sarcastic little laugh.

"Heaps of time, Lily!" she said, mockingly and bitterly. "Take your choice as to days."

She swung her small foot angrily, and the small foot touched something on the floor. Richenda glanced down. It was the third letter, which must have dropped from her hands in opening the other. She stooped languidly, and picked it up; and still more languidly she opened it without one glance either at the handwriting or the

post mark. She began to read it casually. As her eyes made their way down the page a pink flush stole into her cheeks. It deepened and deepened fast; then it all faded, leaving her very white. She sat down heavily in the nearest chair, and caught with one hand at the back of it. Then she began to read the letter through again. The pink came back in the form of a vivid crimson, which overspread the pretty face from brow to throat; and Richenda, still grasping the letter, started up, throwing down her chair by the suddenness of the movement. She rushed across the drawing-room, flung open the door, and dashed into the hall and threw open the dining-room door.

"Mr. Langton! Mr. Langton!" she cried. "Do listen! The rest are out, and I must tell some one! Do you think it can be true, really? Oh, do listen!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"THIS is the house, sir."

The driver of a hansom cab which had pulled up at the gate in the railings of the red-brick villa, spoke the words through the trap to his fare. The cab had stopped at least a moment before, and as the occupant had no belongings, small or large, the driver had expected him to jump out at once. But he had looked about him doubtfully, first at the street in which he found himself, then at the red-brick villa itself. It was this hesitation that had led to the driver's reassuring words.

"You are sure?"

"In course, sir. At least, according to what you says to me. Number five you says, and number five it is. Thank you, sir, I'm sure."

The last words bore reference to the money which the man inside the cab, who had risen while the driver was speaking, now placed in his hand. With a quick movement he got down now from the step, and went in at the gate and up to the front door.

The driver looked after him contemptively.

"Nice-spoken, free-handed swell!" he said to himself as he turned the horse round. "Now what's the like of him doing hereabouts, I wonder?"

The front door of the red-brick villa was opened, as the driver drove himself and his reflections away; opened by the one servant of the establishment. This was a girl of about sixteen, whom Mrs. Langton spoke of in terms of heartfelt satisfaction as a "treasure." It is therefore to be pre-

sumed that it was her intrinsic worth which led to her outward shortcomings, for these were various. She had unkempt and frizzled hair, surmounted by a cap with long and very dirty white streamers; she had a grimy cotton frock, and both her bare arms and her face bore trace of recent contact with the kitchen range.

The man on the doorstep had never seen, much less stood before a door opened by, such a servant. For a moment he gazed in wonder at her. Then the "treasure" said sharply:

"Well, sir?"

And he seemed to collect himself.

"Is Miss Leicester in?" he said.

The "treasure" took a moment for consideration, then she replied brusquely: "Yes, walk this way," and proceeded to shut the door and marshal him across the hall. He followed her very meekly to the drawing-room door; he paused equally meekly while she inserted her person into the room, and he obeyed her implicitly when she came out and said:

"There's no one there; you can walk in."

"What name?" she added, with the door in her hold.

"Sir Roderick Graeme," he said.

Titled visitors were not of everyday occurrence at the red-brick villa; and the "treasure" seemed to realise this fact, for she took a long and comprehensive survey of Sir Roderick with very widely opened eyes before she shut the door with a bang and disappeared.

Left to himself, Sir Roderick drew a chair out from its place, and sat down. He established himself close to the window, in the very place where Richenda had stood that morning reading her letters. Though it was afternoon now, the little back drawing-room was still hot and stuffy, and he thought he would get as much air as possible. He looked deliberately and curiously, from this position, all round the small room. His eyes were not always especially observant, but now they took in every detail of the worn, ugly furniture, the frightful cretonne and the faded carpet. Even the pictures and the fire-screen received a share of his attention.

"Great Scott!" he said, below his breath, as he finished his survey. "My poor little girl! I can manage something better than this, that is certain!"

He fixed his eyes, as he said it, on that pattern in the faded carpet which was immediately below them, and fell to

tracing its worn outlines with his stick with apparent concentration.

Sir Roderick's face wore an expression that was strange and unusual. It was very diffident, and very humble. And though as the background of this there was an unmistakeable decision, yet there was in his outward manner a hesitation and a nervousness which were altogether foreign to his simple and un-self-conscious personality.

He had traced the pattern carefully at least four times, when the drawing-room door opened suddenly. Sir Roderick looked up, and got up hastily. A slight flush appeared on his face, as he saw Richenda Leicester's.

On Richenda's face there was a glowing crimson colour, and Sir Roderick, well as he had thought he knew it, told himself that he had never seen it so pretty before. Her beautiful eyes were sparkling with some kind of excitement, and her mouth was set in the prettiest of its many sweet curves.

"How do you do?" she said, in answer to Sir Roderick's somewhat diffident greeting. "I am very glad to see you."

If Sir Roderick's manner had an unusual diffidence, Richenda Leicester's, on the contrary, had an unusual certainty. It was a certainty Sir Roderick, at any rate, had never seen in her; and the consciousness of it, and of its strangeness, added to his own confused nervousness.

"I am very glad to see you," he said awkwardly.

"Won't you sit down?" Richenda said. They were standing, face to face, by the window.

"Thank you," he said simply, and sat down again in the chair from which he had risen. Richenda sat down opposite to him in the pretence at an easy-chair that was all the room afforded.

"It was very kind of you to come so far to see me," she said, looking up at him with her sparkling eyes. As she sat, she tapped the tip of her small foot on the ground with an incessant little movement, as if it were impossible to her to keep quite still. She twisted her fingers restlessly in and out of each other, the beautiful crimson colour on her cheeks kept deepening and paling, and her eyes seemed actually to dance with excitement.

Sir Roderick was very much taken aback. He was a modest young man in his heart, and he never imagined that all this excitement arose from his own arrival. Besides, even a vain man could not have thought so; it was not the kind of excitement that

would be called forth by any attachment to him on her part. It was far too obvious, far too unrestrained and simple. But it seemed to possess Richenda wholly, and Sir Roderick could not understand it at all. All he did perceive was that the girl before him was a Richenda Leicester who was quite different to the girl who had been in his thoughts and his heart of late; this was a girl he did not know. This girl seemed to have lost all remembrance of the relations that had existed between them. She knew him and welcomed him as an acquaintance, but the ground on which they met was all changed; no thoughts of when, or where, or how they had ever met before seemed to find a place in her mind. They seemed to be all swept out of it by something which he did not and could not understand. Nevertheless, his purpose remained the same; indeed, Richenda's wonderfully increased beauty had only strengthened it in his mind.

"No," he said, in answer to her words. "No, it isn't kind, except to myself. Miss Leicester, I may as well——"

He was interrupted. Richenda evidently had not heard a word of his last speech, and she broke uncereemoniously into it without any definite consciousness that he was speaking at all.

"I'm so glad you've come," she went on, just as if he had not spoken in answer to her, "because I do so want to tell some one else! I've told every one I can think of, but there are very few people in this house."

Sir Roderick stared at her in amaze. Was his brain unsteady, he wondered, or was hers? For what could she mean?

"I don't quite understand," he said humbly.

"No! How should you!"

She laughed a light, ringing laugh.

"That's why I'm so glad you've come," she cried. "It is my letter—my letter that came this morning I want to tell you about. I have had a lot of money left to me! I am rich! Quite rich!"

She stopped, her dancing eyes sparkling more than ever.

Sir Roderick stared at her hard for a moment, and then his face grew slowly rather pale.

"You are rich?" he said hesitatingly and doubtfully. "You have some money, did you say?"

"A lot!" she said exultingly. "It truly is a lot! It is—Mr. Langton says so—enough for me to have a nice large house of

my own, and have the boys to do. Oh, it is so very nice!"

"It has been left to you?" said Sir Roderick. His voice was rather strange to himself, and he seemed to find it oddly difficult to grasp what Richenda was saying.

"Yes," she said. "Yes, it has. My cousin of ours, quite an old man, whom I never knew, has died very suddenly. I never even knew he was dead. He was kind to us, he has been paying for the boys to go to school; but I never, never dreamed of his leaving us money! And now he has left it to me. To me! And I can make it all so nice for the boys. I can't tell you how nice it all is. Don't you think it's lovely?"

Sir Roderick bit his lip under the shelter of his moustache.

"Indeed, I do," he said slowly. "I congratulate you, I do indeed. I am very glad to hear of it."

His words came rather stiffly in the midst of Richenda's unrestrained excitement. But she did not seem to heed, or even to know this.

"Oh, I don't know what to do, I am so glad!" she exclaimed. "I can do such beautiful things, it's all like a dream. It's thousands of pounds! Fancy me with thousands of pounds!"

"Have you a—any adviser on whom you can rely?"

"His lawyer—I mean our cousin's—is going to help me. He is to go on managing it all; he says the will said so. And he's coming here to see me to-morrow. Oh, I can't think of anything else at all!"

There was a little pause. Sir Roderick's eyes traced out once more the faded pattern they had been following when Richenda came into the room. Then he rose from his chair.

"I must be going now," he said. His voice was still strange and a little strained. "I am very glad I happened to be here to hear of your good fortune. I congratulate you with all my heart."

He was preparing to shake hands, but Richenda had not offered him hers as yet.

"Won't you have some tea?" she said. "Must you really go? Mrs. Langton said she would get some."

"I must really go," he said, "thank you very much."

She rose, and with her still sparkling eyes full upon him, she let him take her hand.

"I'm so glad you came," she said. "It was nice to have you to tell it to. Isn't it delightful?"

"Delightful," he echoed gravely.

And then he let her hand fall, and went out of the drawing-room. Richenda rang the bell energetically, but the "treasure" did not appear, and Sir Roderick let himself out of the house. He shut the iron gate in the heavy railing with the minutest care, and then he walked slowly down the dreary suburban street in the heat of the August afternoon. He had a dim idea that he was walking to a cab-stand, but he had passed two without seeing them before he mechanically hailed a passing hansom, got in, and was driven back to more familiar parts of London.

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PRISONERS OF SILENCE.

By MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

Author of "A Palliant Ignorance," "A Mere Cypher,"
"Cross Currents," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THERE was a dead silence in the room. It was North's room in the hospital, and the early afternoon sunshine was streaming in; it was only forty-eight hours since the cold, wet day which had seen Bryan Armitage in the same room, but the weather had changed as completely in that short interval as though a month of spring had intervened. Standing on the hearthrug with his back to the unnecessary little fire and his hands behind him, was an elderly man with iron-grey hair; he was one of North's colleagues on the staff of the hospital, and his deeply-lined, rather stern face was turned with an air of keen observation upon the only other occupant of the room, North Branston himself, who stood by the window gazing out into the sunshine.

The elder man did not speak; apparently he respected his companion's rather pronounced stillness. And after a moment North turned slowly towards him. His face was rather white and rigidly controlled.

"I am not surprised," he said. "I have suspected something of what you say for some time." He paused, and then added in a low, restrained voice: "Has she any suspicion herself? Was she alarmed?"

The other man cast a quick, shrewd glance at him.

"It is difficult to say," he returned. "Mrs. Vallotson is a lady of extraordinary reserve, and, I should say, of considerable fortitude. Some idea as to the direction in which her symptoms point she must have,

however, I imagine; though of course it is not likely that she guesses the extent of the mischief."

"What did you tell her?"

"She asked me no questions."

There was another silence, and then North said slowly:

"If it is as you think at present, there is nothing to be done."

"Nothing effective," asserted the elder man. "Of the main fact, as I told you, there is no doubt. As to the possibility of treatment and so forth I shall be able to judge better when I have seen her again. But, of course, cure is out of the question."

"How far has it gone?"

A few brief technical sentences came from the other man.

"If we can operate," he concluded gravely, "she may live a year, or even longer. If not——"

He finished his sentence with a slight expressive movement of his shoulders.

A moment or two elapsed before North spoke.

"When do you see her again?" he said.

"In a week," was the reply. The elder man added a few technical details as to the reasons which had determined the length of the interval, and as he finished, North came forward into the room.

"Thank you, Grant," he said. "It is very good of you to undertake the case for me."

Dr. Grant knew something, though not all, of his colleague's story, and he looked rather curiously at the speaker.

"Not at all," he said. "I am only sorry to have had to tell you this, Branston." He held out his hand with an impulse of cordiality by no means usual with him, and then said hurriedly: "Shall we go down now?"

The wards were visited; the regular

hospital routine, which had been awaiting the appearance of the two doctors, was gone through; and then North Branston ascended the stone staircase once more, and entered his own room alone. He flung himself into his arm-chair and leaned forward, gazing straight before him.

He was not surprised. His keen professional eyes had observed his mother too closely and too long to allow of much room for doubt in his mind as to what, in broad outline, would be the result of the medical interview which he had urged upon her. He had suspected for some time past that she was very ill; and his doctor's mind was too intimately acquainted with the slight dividing line which separates, in such disease as that from which he believed her to be suffering, the grave from the fatal, to render the development of his suspicions in the least strange to him. But though the sentence pronounced found him by no means unprepared, it came upon him as a shock which shook him through and through.

She was to die. The slow, sullen rebellion of her life was to be cut off. The long course of blind, stubborn wrong was to cease; the bitter steps of her life's journey were drawing to an end.

The educating processes of this life are, for the most part, slow and still. A moral earthquake may prepare the mind, but it is in the heavy, laborious quiet that follows that are instilled, letter by letter, the truths of which the earthquake was the herald. The process goes on silently, unhastily, and the stunned creature, living and enduring from day to day, is hardly conscious that he is learning anything. Then, in that same routine there comes a check; something occurs to change the current of life. The stunned condition from which he has all this time been slowly emerging, drops from him suddenly, and some sense—faint or uncertain it may be, but inalienable—of the truth as yet but half spelt out dawns upon him.

Through some such process as this North Branston had passed during the past six months, and with the death sentence to which he had just listened there had come upon him that complete clearance of the senses which is the condition of final comprehension. Day by day as he trod the path that stretched before him over the ruins of what might have been; day by day as that exaltation which is born of great crises died out; as loneliness grew into his life, as the strain of that only intercourse vouchsafed him,

pressed with ever increasing weight upon him; he had been waking from that quiescence which had bowed his head before an inexorable presence, featureless and without name. As day after day brought its relentless claim upon that finer nature in him, released and given play for the first time; each with its pitiless demand upon his mercy, his endurance, his patience; he had been learning, learning in all unconsciousness, the first syllables of that lesson which alone could unveil for him that presence and reveal the meaning of the sword it bore.

And as charity—that supreme sense of a common nature flowing from a common source—is the perfect flower of that lesson, so, even in his first faltering and unconscious spelling out of it, there had risen in North Branston a great pity and tenderness for that fellow-scholar who would not—who could not—learn. Centre of his life still, his mother was at once his educator and that which his growing knowledge illumined. Watching the slow torture of her strife with fate, her blind incomprehension, her unyielding defiance, the tragedy of her life had disengaged itself from the tragedy of his own, until it stood out sharp and distinct against the black background of sin, and cried for a solution. Even her hatred of himself became to him only another element in that tragedy. She was his mother. Out of the constant forbearance of his intercourse with her; out of his position as her sole dependence; above all, out of that pity for her which grew in him, dawned a strange sense of the mysterious meaning the words contained. She was his mother. Love between them could never be. But something he might have given her, if she would have received anything at his hands; something that might have held for both of them some touch of balm.

And now she was to die. He sat there staring blankly before him, and all the meaning of the words came home to him. She was to die. The hand that had smitten once, that had forced the cup of retribution to her rebellious lips, was raised to strike again, and this time on the blow would follow silence. Without volition on her own part her life had been crushed; without volition on her own part it was to be withdrawn. She was to die, and death for North Branston meant annihilation. Was that indeed the sole solution of the tragedy? Was that indeed the end?

To all the processes which he could follow, at least, it brought cessation. The

fierce unconquerable heart was to be stilled; the working brain was to return to the elements of which it was composed. It was the physical finality beyond which North Branston had not looked for years; the boundary line at which he had deliberately elected to stop. And thus brought face to face with it, the question rose in him clear and distinct—to what purpose had been all this agony? To what end had been lived this life, which, as the shadow of conclusion rolled down upon it, seemed to be lighted up for him with a ghastly distinctness? And as he asked himself the question, the power which had risen before him six months earlier to dominate and stun him, rose before his cleared and steadier perception, and challenged him to name it.

The two questions—the question which he asked of death, and the question wrung from him by life—were indissolubly knit together. If that physical life, drawing now to an inexorable end, was indeed all; if that blind, impervious spirit was to be quenched thus at random; if the pitiless discipline of life had no meaning and no intention beyond itself, then the force that dominated humanity was a mechanical force, a power neither of good nor evil, purposeless, meaningless. If, on the other hand, that power was sentient; if behind its dealings with mankind there was a living will, a changeless intention, an unfathomable beauty, then those processes, seen here so incomplete and objectless, must have an object beyond the ken of the materialist, must reach completion in another life than this.

The proposition was formulated in North Branston's mind clear-cut and distinct, and he faced it steadily and deliberately. Sudden revolutions of belief are not common with men; with men of North's type they are perhaps impossible. The changed faith lies in a man's mind, looked at still as a mere possibility long after it has become conviction. Even as he sat there, absorbed in every fibre by the question before him, its answer lay within him, strong and silent, waiting until the unhurrying processes of time should bring it recognition.

More than an hour passed and he had not moved. At last a sigh parted his lips. He let his hands fall forward over his knees as he lifted his head, pausing a moment, as though his mind were only gradually coming back from the depths in which it had been wandering. Then he rose, pushing back the grey hair from his forehead, and looking

about him rather uncertainly. He glanced at the clock. It was nearly five, and with an instinctive desire for air and exercise he determined to walk home.

It was a lovely afternoon. The sun was setting, but the air was still soft, and even in the City there was a breeze. North Branston, threading his way with regular, even stride along the crowded pavement, lifted his head with unconscious satisfaction to meet it. Coming eventually to Piccadilly, and finding himself on the more frequented north side, he prepared to cross to where the Green Park stretched away, quiet and lovely, with its first faint veil of green touched by the sunset light. He was just turning towards the road when the door of a shop on his right hand opened suddenly, and a lady came rapidly out, turning in the opposite direction to that in which North was walking, thus directly meeting him. For the first time for six months; for the first time since he had left her unconscious in her own drawing-room; he was face to face with Eve Karslake.

Eve Karslake, or Eve Karslake's ghost? The features were sharpened and haggard; the colouring had faded to a dead level of pallor varied only by the dark shadows that lay beneath the eyes; and the eyes themselves burned with an unquenchable fire of misery and rebellion. Every line of her face told of pain; of pain known for the first time; of pain as a tyrant, resented, cried out against, and inexorable.

They were close together. There was nothing remarkable about a man and a woman meeting on the pavement in Piccadilly; and on either side of them the passers-by went on their way unheeding. The recognition had been simultaneous on either side, and for a long moment the eyes of each were fastened on the other's face. Then North Branston recovered himself; recovered, that is to say, such a rigid self-control as alone was possible. He bowed slightly, and was preparing to pass on. But as he moved Lady Karslake moved also. She slightly stretched out her hand. It was the slightest possible movement, but there was a swift tenseness about it which made it as eloquent as a cry could have been.

"No," she said rapidly. The music of her voice was gone, and it was low and hoarse. "I must speak to you—I must!"

He had stopped instantly.

"Where?" he said. He spoke as though he hoped, by the commonplace query, and all the sordid, commonplace difficulty it suggested, to still the intensity of her feelings.

She glanced about her quickly.

"The Park," she said.

Without another word she turned swiftly towards the road, and without another word he followed her. They passed into the Green Park, and turned down one of its little frequented paths, side by side.

It was very quiet there. The roar of London seemed to subside and grow less with every step they took. The light was waning, and the stillness of coming twilight was creeping over everything. The voices of some children playing on the grass came floating over the evening air, their discordant shrillness softened by distance; but, for the rest, the Park was almost empty.

But the silence between them remained unbroken. They walked on mechanically, neither glancing at the other.

At last, with a vague instinct towards lessening for her the strain which was becoming unendurable, North turned and looked at her. Her face was quivering helplessly. They were close to a seat, and he stopped abruptly.

"Sit down!" he said.

There was authority in his voice, and she obeyed him instinctively. She sank down on the seat, turning away from him as she did so, and letting her face fall forward for an instant on her hands with a swift, expressive movement of self-humiliation.

"I can't," she gasped. "I've longed to say it. It has been killing me—killing me—killing me! And now—I can't!"

North's face worked painfully as he stood beside her, looking down upon her bowed head. His lips moved, but no sound came from between them. A moment passed, and then she lifted her head to him in a passion of self-compulsion.

"I will!" she cried. "I will! What does it matter if it kills me to say it? North, North, forgive me! I loathe myself so! I despise myself so! I can't forget it! I can't get away from it! If I could blot out what I said! If I could even unsay it! Oh, North, North, North, I would live through it all again—I would bear anything—if I could only wipe those words out of my life!"

She had not raised her voice; she was speaking hardly above her breath; but the intensity of her utterance shook her from head to foot. The pallor of her face had given way, a burning colour flooded her throat and the very roots of her hair. She broke off, choked.

North had listened to her, transfixed and motionless, the original heart wrung

incomprehension of his expression giving way to incredulous protestation and pain. As she paused he drew a step nearer with a low, incoherent ejaculation.

"Eve," he said, "don't speak like that, for Heaven's sake!"

She interrupted him sharply, wildly.

"I've lived like that," she cried, "all these months—all these long, horrible months. Everything has been more unendurable to me because of it. Oh, North, I've realised what I must have seemed to you. I've realised it, do you understand? And I've thought if you could only know how I hated myself—how it wasn't I who spoke at all, but something bad and dreadful——"

She had risen as she spoke, stretching out two imploring hands. And as her voice faltered and grew faint, all his strength rose in North Branstons to comfort and support her. He took the two trembling hands into a firm and gentle hold, and met her eyes with a face on which nothing appeared but reverence and tenderness.

"I do know," he said. "If it comforts you that I should know it, I have known it all the time."

"That I was mad!" she reiterated. She was clinging to his hands as though she hardly realised to what she held. "That it was because I loved you so! That I was like people hurt too much, who will say anything, do anything, to get rid of the pain? You know it?"

"I know it," he said again.

"And you haven't grown to hate me and despise me?"

He did not answer her in words, but he smiled. She looked at him for a moment, and then the strain relaxed. Her lips quivered like a child's; she covered her face with her hands, and sat down suddenly in a passion of silent weeping.

North did not watch her; he realised instinctively that her tears were the tears of unutterable relief, and he turned his face away and let them flow unchecked; while every low sound of her crying cut him to the heart.

Rooted and grounded in that past from which the North Branstons of to-day was for ever divided, his love alone had survived that catastrophe which had crushed out all that love's hopes, and in the midst of the new conditions of his mental being it burnt on unquenched, unquenchable. It is not in the supreme moment of parting that severed lives know their worst pain.

It is in the weary days that follow, when the heart must hunger and grow sick with hunger, unsatisfied; when the weary longing for a look, a word aches through every sense; when the sun rises and sets, and brings only the knowledge that it must rise and set for as long as life shall last on a world empty of the one presence desired; it is then that love passes through the fire to come out conquered or conqueror. Day by day as he worked on uncomplaining, North's heart had been wrung in his yearning for the woman he loved. The thought of her suffering had never left him; the longing for her presence had haunted him by day and night. In the moment of his renunciation of her its flame had shot up white and strong, consuming all the narrow limits which had closed it in. And in the clearer air which gradually surrounded it, it had only rarefied and grown stronger.

Her weeping ceased at last. He heard her move and lean back against the seat as though worn out. He looked at her uncertainly, and she met his eyes and tried to smile.

"I am better," she said; her voice was faint and weak, but the sharp note of agony rang in it no longer. "I am very sorry." She paused, and looked away through the shadowy trees that loomed up about them. "I do not loathe myself so much," she said, "but—it makes so little difference."

He did not speak; there was nothing he could say. There was another brief silence and then she roused herself.

"We must go directly," she said in a level, monotonous voice. "Tell me what you are doing—where you are living!"

He told her briefly, and then he paused. He hardly understood what instinct dictated his next words.

"I am not alone," he said quietly.

She looked up at him swiftly and understood. Her face crimsoned, and she lifted her hand as if to stop him.

"You hurt me," she said. "Don't."

There was disgust and protest in the last word, and North saw that her brows were drawn together and her lips set. He hesitated for an instant, and then said in a low voice:

"You can't—forgive!"

"Forgive!"

Into the two syllables there was compressed such an unutterable scorn and negation as no flow of speech could have amplified. Upon that knowledge which

had come to North so recently they struck jarring and discordant, and he spoke quickly.

"Try to think gently of her," he said.

"Try to think gently of her!" she repeated; she rose with a swift, impetuous movement. "The thought of her is an insult to me—can't you understand? I try—I try with all my heart never to think of her at all. The thought of her existence is a horror to me."

"It will not be for long!"

The words came from him almost in spite of himself, and they arrested her.

"What do you mean?" she said slowly.

He answered her very quietly.

"She has not long to live," he said.

"Is she—ill?"

He spoke two brief sentences, and as she heard them the haughty protest died out of Lady Karlake's face before a flash of womanly horror. She did not speak for a moment.

"That means horrible pain?" She was shuddering a little, and her eyes had dilated.

"Pain or stupefaction—yes," he said heavily.

"Does she know?"

"Not yet."

"Ah, poor thing!"

As the cry escaped her, she forced her lips together and stood motionless, fighting the imagination which was forcing itself upon her almost against her will.

"Is—her daughter with her?" She spoke abruptly, almost fiercely.

"No, she is quite alone."

She did not answer; but she lifted both hands to her head as though the struggle within were physically distressing to her. Then she glanced quickly round her. It was growing almost dark.

"I must go," she said hurriedly. "I must. Oh, I wish—I wish you hadn't told me this." She paused and looked at him. "You have forgiven her!" she said.

"I have not thought of it," he said simply.

She turned away from him sharply.

"You are so strong," she cried brokenly. "So strong! Oh, North, North, why must it be? What have we done that we should suffer so? Why were we born if it was only for this? It does no good; it serves no purpose; it leads to nothing."

And then, with the agonised voice of the woman he loved ringing in his ears, the conviction so long latent in North Branstons' soul sprang into active life and clothed itself in words. He drew a step

nearer to her. His eyes were fastened on her, and in their depths there was a struggling perception, before which all the lines of his face seemed to alter and gain alike in dignity and strength.

"That's our mistake," he said. His voice was very low; it came from between set teeth. "We were not born for this, but for that to which this is to lead. There is a purpose in the life of every man; yes, even of the most wretched. I think it is because the limits of that purpose are beyond our comprehension; because its depths are vaster than we can plumb that we ignore it and deny it."

She had grown very still, and as he paused she lifted her head and looked at him, startled, uncomprehending. She did not speak, and he went on again, the glow in his eyes deepening.

"This world is not the end," he said. "That's why its riddle is so hard to read. But I believe there is an answer, and I can wait to know it."

She looked at him for a moment longer, her brows drawn together, her eyes half wild.

"I don't understand," she said. "I don't understand. I only know that we suffer; that we suffer horribly; suffer for sins not ours. I only feel the misery of life and its intolerable injustice."

He took her hands gently into his own.

"We must be patient," he said. "Nothing else will help us. Nothing else will teach us anything."

HAUNTING MEMORIES.

A STORY OF THREE NEW YEARS' EVES.

I.

It happened long years ago, but I remember it well, as if it were yesterday. We sat round the fire telling stories, and with our merry laughter drowning the sobbing of the dying year. I was just in the most thrilling part of a gruesome ghost story when my brother Philip started up, saying: "Hush! What's that? I am sure I heard a child's cry." We listened, and when we were about to ridicule him, the cry was heard again. My father left his seat and opened the door to see who it was.

It was a fearful night; the wind and sleet swept into the hall, and seemed to waft to my ears a low, mocking laugh.

An exclamation from my father made us rush out pell-mell. There, standing in the

snow, was the very loveliest girl it is possible to imagine. She was about three years old, and I was fifteen. Seeing us, she came forward and lisped:

"Mammie done, and me so told."

Of course we took the little one in, and searched near and far for any trace of her relatives, but we could learn nothing. Before many weeks had passed she had so twined her little self about our hearts that we feared any one might turn up and take her from us. We called her Eve, for two reasons. One was because she came to us on New Year's Eve, and the other because she was the only female among us, except our old servant, Margaret.

I, Fred Dempster, was the youngest of seven boys. The day my eyes opened to the light of earth closed my mother's for ever.

II.

Eve was the treasure of the household as we grew together from childhood to maturity. Fifteen years later—I remember it well—I was sitting in the dining-room, idly gazing upon the lawn. Suddenly the door was flung open, and as suddenly closed again; but not before I had caught sight of flowing draperies.

"Eve," I cried, "Eve, come here. I want to speak to you seriously."

She sprang into the room with a bound.

"Well, Fred," she said, laughing mischievously, "what's wrong with the—oh, I beg your pardon. I didn't mean it, and I didn't say it either, did I? I am trying so hard not to talk slang, but you have delighted in teaching it to me ever since I was a little girl; and when you see that the seed has taken root you—well, you don't like it. That's all."

Something in my face—perhaps a fleeting expression—must have told her my thoughts. She coloured a little, and with a merry twinkle in her eyes, though somewhat nervous in her manner, she said:

"Please don't, Fred. Like the little maid in the poem, you are seven, and all have spoken seriously to me except the first and the seventh; the first never will, and I do not want the seventh to do so."

The sweet young lips quivered slightly, and tears trembled on the long drooping eyelashes. It was no wonder I loved her. She was as lovely as a dream. Her golden hair, kissed by the sun, rippled over her head in rich wavy masses, and curled on her pure, fair brow as if it loved to linger there.

"Eve, Eve," I said, "what do you mean?"

Surely you know that I love you—have loved you for years. Can you not love me a little?"

There was no answer. Her golden head drooped lower and lower, until her chin rested upon a bunch of kingcups that was pinned in her dress. Her trembling hand sought them, and she pressed them lovingly.

"What am I to understand by your silence, Eve?" I asked. "Have you no heart to give? Only tell me, dear," I pleaded, "and I will go away and never trouble you any more."

Ah, me! How well I recollect those words, and how she bashfully crept into my outstretched arms, saying softly:

"No, no, Fred, you must not go. I love you!"

And then, as if ashamed of her confession, she hid her face on my breast, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

III.

MONTHS passed away since our declaration of love, but no amount of coaxing or reasoning would induce Eve to talk of our wedding. One evening I was restless, and went into the grounds to smoke a cigarette. It was midnight. The house was hushed in slumber. I walked on, fearing nothing. Presently I thought I heard a footstep. Yes, I was not mistaken; a firm, light tread trampled on the crisp leaves at every step. I waited breathlessly. A tall, slim man, clad in a heavy overcoat, came in sight, and walked deliberately to the side of the house in which Eve had her room. Lifting some gravel, he threw it lightly at her bedroom window. A moment—it seemed an eternity to me—and Eve, with a light cloak thrown over the dress she had worn that evening at dinner, came out, and noiselessly closed the door behind her. One moment she hesitated until her eyes got accustomed to the darkness, and then she was enfolded in the arms of the stranger.

Oh, the torture and agony of that fearful night! But the morning dawned at length, clear and beautiful; and Eve, as fresh and innocent-looking as ever, met me at the breakfast-table.

I was mad with love, wounded pride, and jealousy. After breakfast I followed her, and asked her again to name a date for our wedding. Laying her two little hands on mine, she stood up on her toes, and held up her sweet flower-face to be kissed. I stooped and kissed her.

"Fred, darling," she said, "why are you so impatient? We are very happy."

"Eve," I asked, "who is the man you met last night in the grounds?"

She looked up at me quickly, her large velvety eyes filled with tears.

"I cannot tell you, Fred; I cannot break my promise."

I would not be satisfied with that; hard words were interchanged, and I left her in anger.

IV.

It was another New Year's Eve—sharp and frosty; a moonlight night, resonant with the sounds of an icebound world. I could not rest, for Eve had promised to tell me her secret that night, and had failed to do so; she did not even keep the appointment which she had made to meet me. As I walked out into the open road a little later, I fancied I heard voices. I was not mistaken. Some one was talking near a clump of trees some distance away. Thinking they were poachers, I hurried forward and listened. Imagine my dismay when I recognised the voice. It was Eve's, raised in angry determination.

"I tell you," she said, "I will end it to-night. I shall——"

"You must not. I tell you again it is impossible; you must forget him. Fred can never be your husband, but I dare not tell you why as yet."

Her companion was the man I had seen her with before, and my blood being roused, I broke in upon them and demanded an explanation. I suppose I must have approached him in a threatening manner, for with a wild, frightened air he drew back, and pulled out a revolver. I closed with him. Owing to the frozen nature of the ground we slipped. There was a flash, a report, and a low, sharp cry. The next moment Eve staggered forward, and I caught her in my arms.

V.

"THAT is," said Eve, pointing to the man, "my mother. . . . Fred, I have always been true to you." Those were her last words. A little later the eyelids quivered, the lips settled into a sweet smile, and my darling was dead.

VI.

It was all too true. Eve's companion was a woman in the disguise of a man; she was indeed Eve's mother, my brother Philip's wife, whom he had married abroad and deserted.

Ay, it was all too true. And every New Year's Eve I hear that cruel shot again. Hark!

THE HUMOURS OF SALES.

TURNING over the leaves of a contemporary magazine the other day, I chanced to come upon "A Reverie at Christie's," written by a well-known writer. It set me thinking of the strange perversity of fate which follows the collections of the man who has pursued with an intensity of purpose through his lifetime his one idea. For this he has spared neither time, trouble, money; he has been happy when he has added a gem to the gathering, he has fretted for days when he has missed an opportunity; and now he is dead and the whole valuable collection is sold without reserve. Here there is a moral deep enough to make us reflect if we only read it aright. "Sic transit gloria mundi" should be the motto of auction rooms; they are better than sermons, and the auctioneer in his rostrum speaks as from a pulpit. His hammer likewise conveys a lesson, that is, if we are in the vein to hear it; it taps as it were a death-knell to old associations. Look at that beautiful lady! She was painted by Sir Joshua to please a loving husband, a fond father, or an admiring friend. It was a gala day when the picture came home, and was hung in the place of honour; it has never left that place until now, when it is exposed to a strange world of critics, dealers, buyers. There is something pathetic in its solitude in a crowd. But worse again, there are the letters, the innermost secrets of hearts that loved one another, of those who once were friends but who quarrelled for some trifling cause, and here we have the early intimacy set up for sale. If they could have only known when they wrote those tender words that they would be read by cold eyes, canvassed by cold hearts, knocked down for ten shillings or half-a-crown! To my mind there is infinite pathos in those yellow, discoloured mementoes of a dead and gone past, once as present as our own, in the expressions of family affection, the curiously fine strokes of the writing, the little abbreviation, the turns and flourishes. They touch me more than do the enamelled watches that belonged to Marie Antoinette or Mary Stuart, or the powder-horn of Charles Edward. I am afraid even the necklet worn by Helen of Troy would stir me very little in comparison to one of Mary Lamb's or poor L.E.L.'s letters, over which so many tears were shed.

Thinking of auctions takes us back a

long road. They are very ancient institutions, dating back so far as the setting up of the imperial crown on the ramparts of Rome to public auction. This is too far back for our purpose now; those who wish to read a graphic account of the incident must take down their Gibbon. I like better to think of the auctions Horace Walpole talks of to Sir Horace Mann, where he bought his snuff-boxes and his Sèvres cups, and the china monsters which filled up his narrow staircase at Strawberry Hill, where they were oftentimes nearly swept away by the flowing skirts of his fair visitors.

Walpole was oftener taken in at these sales than not. Many of his swans were geese after all, and when his sale came on fetched but meagre prices.

As we cast a glance backward, we see all the celebrities of the last century in the auction rooms: Dr. Johnson and Boswell, Lord Charlemont with Murphy, Lady Wortley Montagu, Angelica Kaufmann, Richardson, Pitt, the Prince Regent. Let us look into Millington's rooms in Bedford Street, Covent Garden; the time, four o'clock, and all the belles and beaux bidding against one another. It was not the custom to have dealers, so the contest was exciting and the bidding very high. It soon grew as great a necessity for a fine lady or gentleman to attend Millington's as to lose money at cards, and when the fashionables went out of town to Tunbridge Wells or Bath, Millington preceded them, and indulged them with their favourite amusement. As demand invariably produces supply, there soon arose an army of auctioneers and dealers all eager to profit by the gullibility of rich patrons. Cocks, the successor of Millington in the favour of the nobility, opened sale-rooms in the Piazza, Covent Garden. They were elegantly fitted up and refreshments were served. Here, in 1741, the collection of Edward Earl of Orford was sold, his Greek and Roman antiquities, scarce editions, and books of prints and drawings. The sums realised at these sales were enormous, and seem to have created a bitter feeling in the minds of the artists who were painting for starvation prices. Hogarth was especially indignant at the picture jobbers and dealers who imported ship-loads of Dead Christs, Holy Families, and Madonnas, "on which they scrawl the names of Italian masters and fix upon Englishmen the name of 'dupes.'" He complains "that if a gentleman with some judgement casts his eyes on one of these subjects, and expresses doubt as to its originality or perfection, the quack answers:

"Sir, you are no connoisseur; the picture, I assure you, is in Alesso Baddmaestro's best manner. Truly sublime; the contour gracious; the air of the head in the high Greek taste, and a most divine idea it is," then spitting upon an obscure place and rubbing it with a handkerchief, he takes a skip to t'other side of the room, and screams out: 'There's an amazing touch!' The gentleman, ashamed to be out of fashion by judging for himself, is struck dumb by this cant, and gives a vast sum for the picture, very modestly confessing that he is indeed quite ignorant of painting, and bestows upon a frightful picture with a hard name a frame worth fifty pounds."

The same complaint was to be heard everywhere, but still the evil grew; skilful dealers and ignorant buyers made it easy for artful persons to manufacture pictures which passed as old masters. This illegitimate traffic was largely followed and cleverly executed. Waagen, who visited most of the collections in England not many years ago, has left on record his surprise at finding so many pictures in different fine collections bearing the names of masters who never painted them. The growing extent of this injurious habit gave rise to a satire by Foote in one of his entertainments called "Tea," given at the Haymarket in 1757. The scene is supposed to be an auction room, but first we have the painting room of the arch conspirator, Mr. Puff. To him enters Carmine, his confederate, who is all anxiety to know how the last sale of pictures went.

"The Guido, what did it fetch?"

"PUFF.—One hundred and thirty guineas.

"CARMINE.—Hum! four guineas the frame, three the painting. Then we divide one hundred and twenty-three.

"PUFF.—Hold, not so fast! Varnish had two pieces for bidding against Squander, Brush five for bringing Sir Tawdry Trifle."

Upon this Carmine waxes very wroth, and is only appeased by Puff, who puts the case very clearly before him.

"Your Susannah," he says, "cannot have cost you more than twenty pounds, and by the addition of your lumber-room dirt and the salutary application of the spalting-pot it became a Guido worth one hundred and thirty pounds. Besides, in all traffic of this kind there must be combination. Varnish and Brush are our Jackals, and it is but fair they should partake of the prey. Courage, my boy, never fear! Praise be to folly and fashion! There are in this town dupes enough to gratify the avarice of all."

Then comes the auction. Puff is disguised as the Baron de Gröningen; Carmine as Canto; and the Jackals, Brush and Varnish, bring in Lord Dape. Between them he is made to buy a St. Anthony of Padua for a large price.

Hogarth, who was in the habit of attending Cocks's auction rooms, conceived there the idea of holding an auction of his paintings at the "Golden Head" in Leicester Fields. For his ticket of admission he produced his well-known etching of the Battle of the Pictures. On the print is inscribed, "The bearer hereof is entitled, if he thinks proper, to be a bidder for Mr. Hogarth's pictures which are to be sold the last day of the month." In one corner he has represented an auction room, on the roof of which he has placed a weathercock, an allusion to Cocks. Instead of the four letters N.E.S.W. we have P.U.F.S. A catalogue and carpet are the signs of the sale. At the end of a long pole there is an unfurled standard emblazoned with all the insignia of the auction room, hammer, rostrum, etc., while the background is filled with the conflicting canvases of Hogarth's "bêtes noires," the Old Masters, which his own works are driving out of the field. The sale took place the last day of the month; the pictures put up were The Harlot's Progress, The Rake's Progress, Morning, Noon, Evening, Night, and The Strolling Players. These masterpieces realised four hundred and twenty-seven pounds seven shillings. Nothing daunted, Hogarth, six years later, tried again with even less success. This time he imagined an original method of conducting the sale, and was ill-advised enough to advertise the total exclusion of his enemies the brokers and dealers. The result might have been foretold. The pictures set up were the inimitable Marriage à la Mode, and for these only one bidder appeared, Mr. Lane, of Hillingdon. The only written offer in the book was for ten pounds, and Mr. Lane said he would make it guineas. He also insisted upon giving some hours' law for the chance of another bidder appearing. As no one came, he carried off the pictures in their fine Carlo Maratti frames which had cost Hogarth four guineas each.

It can hardly be believed that in the face of such a mortifying failure Hogarth should again expose himself to a similar result; but once more he sought humiliation at the hands of a public who were not prone to forgive his satires on their weaknesses. This time

he offered his admirable Election pictures to be raffled for at two guineas a chance. There were to be two hundred chances. Only a small number of his patrons availed themselves of this offer, and when the day of the raffle came, the solitary thrower of the dice appeared in the person of David Garrick. Actor and painter sat looking at one another through a part of the dull afternoon. When no second visitor came, and no message arrived from any of those who had taken tickets, Hogarth's irritation rose to violence; he insisted that as they had not cared either to come or had even asked him to throw for them, Garrick should take his chance. In vain the actor suggested compromise, Hogarth would listen to nothing, and Garrick, like Mr. Lane, carried away his winnings. On his return home, however, he despatched a note to his friend stating that he could not allow himself to possess such works for a mere chance, and that he had placed two hundred pounds in the bank to Hogarth's credit, and that of his heirs. This is the last time we hear of Hogarth trying to dispose of his pictures. The story is a sad one, and fills the reader with honest indignation. It is evidence of the ignorance of the so-called dilettantes of the last century, who slighted the genius who dwelt amongst them, and cast aside his masterpieces to fill their houses with the miserable work of the copyist and the forger, who rifled at their will the pockets of their dupes. Some years later a better spirit began to grow up; it dates from the time that Mr. James Christie, the first member of the now well-known firm, joined the ranks of auctioneers. He was artistic in temperament and honourable in his dealings. The friend of Garrick, Gainsborough, Sheridan, he was not the man to encourage the manufacture of old masters or to give countenance to the Puffs and Carmines. At the same time it is possible that even his keen eye could not always discern the skilful impositions, set up as originals. The first home of James Christie was, as is well known, in Pall Mall, at the house where the Royal Academy held their first exhibitions. The rooms were large enough to accommodate both parties. Later on, however, he removed to the west end of Pall Mall, where he remained until 1826, finally settling in the present house occupied by the firm, King Street. A courteous, handsome gentleman, as we see him in Gainsborough's picture, his advent gave a tone to art sales which they never had before, and have

ever since retained. His rooms were always filled not alone with dealers, buyers, and fashionables, but likewise with men who understood what they came to see. They were made welcome if they never offered a bid; while the fact that impositions were excluded, if possible, and only articles of genuine worth and merit admitted, raised the standard and had the most beneficial effect upon public taste, and for this alone the lover of art should feel grateful to the first of the Christies. The catalogues of the house are most interesting reading. They carry us back one hundred and thirty years—all but four. The value of the jewels, pictures, and china which have been sold at Christie's during this number of years would baffle all attempt at calculation. To enumerate all the great collections that have passed under the hammer of the elder Christie would be well-nigh impossible. Among the most famous were those of Pope Paul the Fourth, in 1770, and of Calonne, the French Ambassador, 1795. In the same year came that of Sir Joshua Reynolds, by order of his executors, Malone and Edmund Burke; the great Orleans collection, the sale of Lady Thomond, the Hope, and the Angerstein collection; the Marlborough Gems. The list is endless; there is hardly a title of distinction, from that of George the Fourth, the Royal Dukes, and including the whole peerage, that will not be found in Redford's list of the Art Sales at Messrs. Christie's, or at Mr. Phillips's rooms in New Bond Street.

The humours of sales are instructive. Fashion changes rapidly, and the manias of collectors and fashionable amateurs are evanescent. One time it is blue china, another Derby, or another Staffordshire pottery that rules the day. In this way no one sale is precedent for another, and those who have experience in auctions agree that so far as pictures are in question there are no regular deductions to be drawn with any certainty of prediction. Great judgement must be exercised—judgement which can only be acquired by years of experience, and which even then may be at fault—in choosing the right moment for offering an important picture or collection so as to meet the feeling of the day. Without proper consideration no good prices will be attained. The market fluctuates strangely. In the days of the Regency high prices were given. Lord Hertford—whose great collection passed on to Sir William Wallace—would run up the price of a picture to five thousand pounds. Lord Dudley gave six thousand

pounds for a pair of Sèvres vases which were probably not worth so many hundreds. A story is told of a nobleman who sent his steward to an auction with directions to buy a certain picture. The work was knocked down for a large sum. The steward returned empty-handed, and told his employer that it fetched such an enormous price he thought it better not to purchase it. "Sir," returned the angry peer, "I did not say anything about the price. I told you to buy that picture, and it was your duty to do so if you and your opponent remained bidding until doomsday."

Pictures are often set up for sale and bought in at a high figure by way of feeling the market. This "dodge," if we may so call it, is speedily seen through, and, like most things of the kind, produces in the long run the very effect which is not desired. "The sale audience," Mr. Redford tells us, "especially at Mr. Christie's, have curiously long memories; they never forget the faces of old friends on the walls, but the fact of their being old acquaintances does not increase their value; the result being that the owner has generally to sell at a much lower price. On the other hand, there are occasional strokes of good luck occur, as at the Rushout Sale, when proof copies of Bartolozzi's engravings after Angelica Kaufmann were put up. Mr. Colnaghi whispered to one of the family that they would only fetch a few shillings, but they realised very good prices. On another occasion four of Smirke's Shakesperian pictures were knocked down to a gentleman for the mere price of the canvas. It is not often, however, that such chances occur."

Book sales are perhaps the most interesting of all auctions. It is here the lovers of first editions, Aldines, Elzevirs, and the like congregate. The limits of this paper will not allow of entering on the subject. It is, however, full of interest, and a day at Mr. Sotheby's rooms is never misspent. I hope my readers will one day visit it with me.

IN THE LAND OF NAILS AND CHAINS.

THE other day, in walking from Dudley to Stourbridge, through some of the most picturesquely broken country in England, but from a humanitarian point of view some of the most ugly, I stepped into the "Maypole Inn," by Cradley, and found myself face to face with the late secretary of the

National Amalgamation of Chainmakers' and Chain Strikers' Associations. I was in the heart of the chain and nail district, and I yearned to see something of the industries. Fate could not have brought me cheek by jowl with a better man for my purpose than Mr. Smith.

"Wait ten minutes while I wash my hands and put on a white shirt, and I'll take you to as many workshops as you like between here and Halesowen."

To such an invitation I agreed at once, and in less than ten minutes—for Mr. Smith is a man of his word, as many sweating employers of labour here can testify—my guide and I set out on our quest.

"Things," said Mr. Smith, as we climbed the first of the hills in our way—bordered by pit banks, indifferent brick houses, and with the dirty Stour in the main valley behind us—"are looking bad again for the men. I mean worse than ever," he added, with impressive energy, so that I should not go off with a false impression about former prosperity in the nail and chain trade.

Then, with much strong language, which came from his heart and might therefore be excused, he discussed the lives and manners of the people towards whom he has tried to play a philanthropic part.

"Sooner than exist as they do, I'd drown myself, sir; and rather than bring daughters into the world to put them to chain and nail making, I'd strangle them as soon as they were born."

Hardly had he loosed this terrible sentence from his lips than he said:

"Let's go in here. You will see a lot of them. But it's a well-managed workshop, and they're better off than most."

Through a doorway and we were in a chain factory: a square apartment of good size, lofty, with plenty of windows and ten or twelve forges. To each forge were apportioned a blower and a worker. Hammer, thud, and clatter ruled the roost, and the heat from the forges was considerable, of course, though I stood in the middle of the factory, among the piles of made chains.

The workers looked up, but did not pause for a moment. The iron rods, molten, were fast being thrashed into ovals and welded one within another, and sweat ran from the bodies of the men and lads.

Mr. Smith, for my instruction, put one of the men through a series of questions. He answered cheerfully, but, as it seemed to me, by rote. He was a skilled worker, and by toiling with hands and feet for

nine hours a day could earn something over a sovereign a week.

But I was more struck by the look of the girls in the factory. Bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked, and smiling, these three or four maidens—aged from twelve to fifteen—were a surprise to me. Yet for nine or ten hours daily they work a bellows apiece in close proximity to a fire. One of them was knitting while she treadled. They were grimy, of course. But they were nevertheless an agreeable surprise to me.

Mr. Smith, however, declined to leave me thus contented.

"They won't be like that long," he said. "They'll be turned into the flat-chested women-men they all are that work at these cursed forges. They'll marry one of these days, go from church to the chain or nail work, and grind on and on like that for the rest of their lives; and if they bring children into the world they'll set the poor little wretches at work like themselves, and so it'll go on to the end of the chapter. Ignorance doesn't express their state. They are just made to be imposed upon."

With that my friend put his finger on a paragraph in a local paper. Thomas Bagley, chainmaker, had lately made his last chain. He had hanged himself with that chain. He did not think a life of daily hard work for a net earning of five shillings a week worth living. There was also another case: Philemon Baker, nailmaker, aged sixty-one, could earn no more than two shillings and sevenpence halfpenny a week, less one shilling and threepence for rent. And so at length, within a day or two of Thomas Bagley's death, Philemon Baker also hanged himself.

"They are sample cases, that's all," said Mr. Smith.

Then we looked into a large chain works. Anchor and hydraulic lift chains were here being forged; links of the strongest kind. And blows also of the strongest kind were being swung with sledge-hammers on to the red-hot links, in front of the glaring forges.

"It needs a strong 'un, maister, for this 'ere work," said one of the men, as he wiped his dripping face on the soaked sleeve of his shirt.

To me it seemed a nightmarish impossibility that man could go on crashing these tremendous blows on iron from morn till eve; yet it is more or less a fact. But it is a consuming sort of labour; a man's meridian in this line is soon passed.

"Smash!" Ah! that was the steam hammer. It had descended and cut a steel

tram rail clean in two. I suppose some day this chain-beating also will be done mechanically. At present the only difference between the domestic workshops here and the large factories seems to lie in the ability of the latter to sweat the former. A machine-worked bellows to several forges at once must have a pull over a bellows to each forge and a worker to each bellows. Of course, too, in the factories there is close Government inspection, better wage—inasmuch as the middleman, or fogger, is excluded—and shorter, because fixed, hours.

This last point was brought home to me as we entered a nail shop of the most approved primitive type; a hovel about nine feet square, with one forge only, a pointing bench on the one side of the forge, and the hammers on the other.

A lean, middle-aged man was making holdfasts; his daughter was pointing them.

"If you'll believe me," said this man dismally—without cessation of work, mind you—"I've been at it from three in the morning to seven and ten at night—often."

"Oh, then you'll be doing fine," said Mr. Smith, "making your two or three pounds a week, I suppose, eh?"

The man and his daughter smiled a sickly smile apiece.

"Not much," said the former. "Sixteen shillings last week was all we made, and taking off for tools and commissions it come to twelve and eight pence. There's your two or three pounds a week for you, master."

Mr. Smith looked at me elatedly. Here was as good an example of the hardness of the local life as could be found. We had approached the workshop between mixens and the like domestic appurtenances of a necessary but disagreeable kind. It is amid these insanitary surroundings that the father and daughter make nails at starvation wage.

Our next visit was to a house in Gibbet Lane—suggestive name! Here, too, however, I was rather gratified by the cheerfulness of the workers and their philosophy than shocked by the tales told of the iniquitous sweating of the fogger. A drop in prices was impending, said the lean, worn sire as he blew up his tiny forge, after the tea half-hour. But he smiled pleasantly as he said he didn't know how things would go with him in consequence.

"There's worse off than we," he observed.

Father and daughter were here as in the other factory; and there was also a little son, who having been working in a coal

mine from seven to three now came to spend his evenings at spiking, blowing, or what not.

About a pound a week represented the united earnings of this family.

Hence we got into the main road between Birmingham and Hagley, with Shenstone's Leasowes gleaming white among the trees across the valley.

We stopped at a new red cottage, snug to look at, with two or three others close by like it. The houses had been built recently by the resident nailer's sons, who had dug the clay, made the bricks, and erected the cottages without other professional help. It did one good to see such comely evidences of thrift and industry.

The nailer himself turned out at our request and took up his hammer.

"Want to see me knock up a few nails, eh?" he asked, and while he did it he congratulated himself that he had made bricklayers of his sons instead of nailers.

"Why," he exclaimed, "they're getting their eightpence the hour. The Lord on'y knows how many hours I be getting my eightpence."

His cottage interior was bright and well furnished. A ham hung from the ceiling of the living-room, and pictures and nick-nacks abounded. But of course this may all be attributed to co-operation.

One more workshop and I had had enough. This was a long shed with eight or ten forges in it: a worker and a blower to each forge. Toil was being carried on with feverish energy under the eyes of the master, who promenaded up and down. There were as many women as men. The heat was great and the smell baddish, and suggestive of its extreme badness in mid-summer. At one forge, one woman—age about twenty-two—used the hammer with her hands and worked the oliver with her feet. I tried to do as she did. She settled a nail in two or three blows. It cost me seven. The force necessary to make the oliver do its duty is very great. The whole power of the body must be concentrated upon the leg muscles. At one forge a man and wife were at work; both but just over twenty. I wondered what their home life must be after such a day's work. A more jaded couple one could hardly imagine.

That sufficed. From the factory we drove to the railway station, and I wished my friend Mr. Smith "Good-bye."

Lastly, with reference to that curse of the domestic nailers, the forger or middleman, the words of Mr. Hingley, M.P.,

whose humble local residence we had passed between Cradley and Halesowen, may be quoted:

"The habits of the workpeople themselves contributed largely to the success of the 'fogger' and to their own misery. Working in their own little shops, under no regulation as to hours of starting or leaving, they worked at irregular times, and thus lived in a hand to mouth sort of fashion, which made them an easy prey to the middlemen, who were ready to take advantage of their necessities. With such people no list was recognised. A man who worked in his own little shop could take in more work than he was able to do, and would give some of it out again at a lower price to others. . ."

These poor nailers are thus in the extremely unsatisfactory situation of being almost forced by circumstances and the impossibility of union to conspire for their own degradation. One fails to see how they can be benefited except by their very extinction.

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS.

A STORY FOR THE CHILDREN.

"WELL, I'm very sorry that I don't understand politics," said a Black-beetle one day, as he stood looking at a sign-post forbidding trespassers.

"You understand politics! You don't understand anything—except how to lick the blacking off a pair of boots," said a Grasshopper, who overheard the remark and felt himself in a particularly tantalising mood.

"Well," said the Black-beetle, "there is one thing which I do understand, and which you seem to be quite ignorant of, and that is how to treat a gentleman when I meet one."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Grasshopper. "Come now, I like that; and you call yourself a gentleman, do you?"

"Well, when I was a child——"

"What did you say? Why, you never were a child; you were always a Black-beetle."

"Well, I mean to say when I was young——"

"And that must have been a precious long time since, I should say, judging from your appearance," was the ready retort of the Grasshopper.

One word brought another, and the pair would have come to blows but for the timely appearance of a sweet little Ladybird.

"Gentlemen," she said, "I am quite

ashamed of you. It is most unseemly to conduct yourselves in this manner; but, there, I suppose I must forgive you, as the cause of your disagreement was politics. How do you do, Mr. Grasshopper; won't you introduce me to your friend?" And she smiled at the Beetle, who gazed at her with a would-be fascinating look.

"With pleasure," replied the Grasshopper; and with a stately air he presented the Ladybird to the Beetle.

"You will excuse me leaving, Miss Ladybird," said the Grasshopper; "I have an appointment, and I find I have loitered long enough."

"Quite too long, I should say," said the Beetle to himself.

"But I am going your way, Miss Ladybird," continued the Grasshopper. "May I accompany you?"

"Thanks, Mr. Grasshopper, but I came to invite you to tea. And will your friend come also?—for we shall be quite a political party, and as I heard him remark a few minutes ago that he was sorry he did not understand politics, he will have the opportunity of hearing the views of some of our best politicians."

The Beetle answered for himself, assuring the Ladybird that he should be "most happy."

"You will come at five o'clock, then. We live in a rose-bush, the third from the shrubbery gate. I will look out for you. Until then, adieu," and with a smile the Ladybird trotted off alongside the Grasshopper.

"I did not think you were so kind to strangers and foreigners, Miss Ladybird," the Grasshopper said, in a rather sarcastic tone.

"Indeed!" she replied. "Then you have been doing me a great injustice, for I am particularly kind to strangers;" and she gave her head a toss such as only Ladybirds can give. And the Grasshopper, who was not the least bit dense, knew that the toss meant, "I am my own mistress, and shall be friends with whom I like."

By this time they had reached the rose-bush, so the Grasshopper said good-bye, and Miss Ladybird went home to prepare for her guests.

"Well, my dear," said Miss Ladybird's mother, "you've been a long time away."

"Yes, mother. I happened to overhear Mr. Grasshopper quarrelling with a friend, and——"

"Why, my child, I thought he was the quietest creature imaginable. How you have surprised me!"

"But, mother dear, I reconciled them and invited his friend to join our party this evening. Was that right, mother?"

"Well, my dear, you did it for the best, but it is always very injudicious, not to say unwise, to meddle with other people's affairs and get mixed up with their quarrels."

"But I didn't mix myself up in their quarrel, mother. I just went in the nick of time to stop their quarrel and prevent them from fighting."

"What! do you mean to tell me that Mr. Grasshopper would fight? Why, he must be positively low. But who is his friend?"

"His name is Black-beetle, and he looks black enough. But what is the matter, mother? You look quite frightened!"

"And no wonder, my dear. I am very sorry that you invited this person, for Black-beetles are our enemies; they have been known to eat us up alive. No good ever comes of mixing oneself up in other people's quarrels. Oh, be careful, my child!"

Cautious Mrs. Ladybird was not far off the mark, for as soon as the Grasshopper and his companion were out of sight the Beetle burst out laughing.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he said. "Yes, my sweet little lady, we will come to tea, and shall wait for supper also, and eat up your fair self as a tit-bit."

But, alas! what the Beetle proposes does not always come off. Mr. Beetle's chuckling anticipation was overheard by a Hedgehog, who followed him to his home, which was underneath an old beer-barrel. The Hedgehog listened at the door—I mean by the beer-barrel—and overheard Mr. Black-beetle's plan, which was to gather all his friends and neighbours together and make a bold attack on the rose-bush, third from the shrubbery gate. The Hedgehog waited to hear no more, but went off to consult his wife.

"Well, my dear," she said, for she was a dutiful wife, "I will do my best; but we are only three among a great crowd. Suppose I go and ask Mrs. Hen and her three daughters, to assist us."

"A splendid plan, my dear. Why, what a good head you have got, to be sure!"

Shortly after five o'clock a dark procession of Black-beetles might have been seen cautiously creeping along the side of the shrubbery and hiding themselves all round about the rose-bush, third from the shrubbery gate. A little behind them came Mr. and Mrs. Hedgehog and their

son ; and behind them again Mrs. Hen and her daughters. "Not a sound was heard," but young Mr. Hedgehog, who was on the watch because his sight was better than his father's, gave the signal only just in time, for the rose-bush was being besieged by the Beetle's numerous friends, and its occupants were screaming for aid. Then what a dash was made by Mrs. Hen and her daughters and the Hedgehogs ! They pecked and pecked until not one Black-beetle remained. But the poor little Ladybird in her fright flew away and quietly hid herself in the very heart of a beautiful rose.

Presently she felt a sudden jerk and peeped out. The rose in which she was hiding was in a basket with some other flowers which were being carried along in a young lady's hand. Another jerk and another peep, and Miss Ladybird hidden in the rose was adorning a dinner-table. Soon the company sat down to dinner, and conversation began. Here little Miss Ladybird heard more about politics in one hour than she had heard all her life in the rose-bush. Dinner came to an end, but Miss Ladybird's troubles were not over. Another jerk, and after a while when she peeped out she saw the rose in which she was concealed adorning a lady's hair. Soon she felt almost choked for want of air, and there was such a buzzing noise and a babel of tongues. She must peep again ; she did so, and to her astonishment she saw a little House-fly walking up the lady's hair and coming towards her. She crept back again among the rose petals, intending not to make friends with this stranger after the consequences resulting from making friends with the Beetle. But the Fly came very close, and she could not help saying "Oh !"

Whereupon the Fly said :

"I beg your pardon, miss ; I am sorry if I intrude."

At the sound of his friendly voice the poor little thing said :

"Please don't go, I'm in such trouble. I am far away from home, and I don't know where I am."

"You don't know where you are ? Why, you are in the theatre. Just peep out and see the people and the lights and things. It's just beautiful. I do enjoy myself here."

She peeped again and saw row upon row of faces all happy-looking, and almost every dress was adorned with flowers.

"I wonder if there are any prisoners in those flowers," she said, "and if they are as miserable as I am !"

"Miserable !" said the Fly. "Are you miserable ? Is it possible that any one could be miserable here, with all these lovely faces and splendid lights ? Why, I can walk up any of these faces if I like, and, do you know, I have such fun sometimes. I alight upon the glass of an opera-glass just as a gentleman lifts it to see a lady through it ; he takes his handkerchief to dust the glass and I pop off, only to pop on again when he wants to see her. And do you see that gentleman down there in the stalls with a bald head ? Well, I've just been having the most beautiful slides imaginable on his pate. He doesn't like it, but I do. But you look tired ; let me go and bring you some chocolate cream. I won't be a minute. See, a young lady in the stalls has got a box full. I'll go and get you a bit."

"Oh, no, thanks, I won't trouble you. Besides, you mustn't steal."

"Steal ! Why, good gracious ! There's more than all of us could eat in a hundred years at the refreshment buffet. Won't you come and have something ?"

"No, thank you, I won't come. I think it is very bad of you to torment people in the manner you do."

"Oh ! I haven't told you half yet. Look at that bald-headed old man in the orchestra ; he is the best violinist here. Well, we do love to torment him. When he is fiddling in some particular piece, I and a few friends take that opportunity to go for slides, and he can't leave off to get at us, and we have a splendid time."

"Well, I call that positively cruel," said Miss Ladybird.

"I call it good fun," replied Mr. Fly.

"Well, I don't."

"Oh, you're a silly little thing. I can't be bothered with you," and the Fly went off buzzing.

"Oh ! what must I do ?" little Ladybird said to herself. "I do wish I was back in the rose-bush with mother. I'm very sure I won't invite any more gentlemen to our house."

Another jerk, and she crept back to her hiding-place ; when she peeped out again she was got in the lady's hair ; she was in a gentleman's buttonhole. The gentleman held the lady's hand lovingly, and the lady looked confidingly into his face. But people were bustling about, and the Ladybird crept back again. Another jerk, and another peep ; the rose she was in was pressed to the gentleman's lips. She was out in the air again.

"Oh, I must escape," she said, and made a bold effort. She was free, and upon looking round found she was near her own garden; and after a very little wandering she found her mother. But on the following morning they left the rose-bush, third from the shrubbery gate, and took a house which was to let in the crack of a gate-post.

"It is the safest place for us," said Mrs. Ladybird. "Now we shall have no trouble and upset of removing in winter."

A SUNDAY AT ARCACHON.

ARCACHON, like other fashionable French bathing-places, is great fun to the contemplative Briton on tour. No doubt our own seaside resorts present their droll side to the observant foreigner. They do that even to the Englishman, though of course in a dulled degree, due to their familiarity. But I fancy there is, upon the whole, more humour at a French watering-place.

We ran down to Arcachon for a first visit one Sunday in September. That is quite the thing to do if you want to see the place at its liveliest. We had inklings of the truth thereof in the Bordeaux railway station. There was a wild, frenzied, screaming horde of fathers and mothers, and children in sun-bonnets and armed with spades and pails—all struggling at the ticket-office and ejaculating "Mon Dieu!" at the top of their voices. We Britons may take our pleasures sadly, but it is a deal better so than in the French mode, which includes the extremes of distressful agitation and of emotional bliss in its comprehensive compass.

A very large lady trod hard on my toes at the ticket place. I exclaimed in anguish. She, on her part, started at my exclamation, and trod on my toes again. It was frightful. I reckoned her weight at eighteen stone. This is no exaggeration, for these southerners of the Gironde district develop bulk in an incredible manner. We found a certain coarse diversion in guessing at the girth of a few of the ladies. One to whom we ascribed a circumference of nine feet at the hips was not, I declare on my honour, at all wronged by our estimate of her. It was a sight to tickle a cynic to see her fly at a relative on the Arcachon station platform and clasp him—a small, shrinking man—to her alarming bosom. He came forth from the sweet ordeal crushed and gasping. There were others enough like her. They

are quite as much characteristics of the country as are the stretches of level pine forest, with gay heather under the trees and sandy soil, through which we passed on our slow way to the holiday town.

Dismal are some of the trains down here. One day we spent an impatient two hours and a half in covering the thirty-five miles between Bordeaux and Arcachon. It was a melting day, too—an experience that made us long for the embrace of a dear Scotch mist. Our fellow-travellers all bore inflamed faces beaded with moisture. And the engine obligingly bred smuts and coal-dust which were drawn to our faces as irresistibly as steel to a magnet.

Worse still are the journeys in the Landes—north and south of Arcachon—where towns are not, and where the infrequent villages are buried among the pines and sand, with spacious, still, gleaming lakes here and there between them. The trains have every encouragement to go fast in such a district. There is nothing in the nature of a steep gradient. Yet they are satisfied with a speed of from eight to twelve miles an hour.

I asked a well-informed native gentleman how this was justified.

"'Mais,' my dear sir," he retorted, as if pricked with pain by my implied protest against his country's institutions, "there are cows. Do you not hear the bells on their necks?"

It is true. They do allow belled kine to roam as they please in the forests—gentle white and black and cream-coloured little beasts. But it seemed to me monstrous that the quadrupeds should not be taught the great lesson of responsibility.

"Does it then happen," I enquired, "that a cow ever receives a blow from one of your trains that may, by extraordinary hazard, prove fatal—to the cow?"

The gentleman used a vigorous apostrophe, and added: "Mon Dieu! Oui. It happens."

For my part, I shouldn't have thought it possible.

But to return. When you have run for a pleasant hour through pine forests, with pink heather and sunny broom on the shaded sward, you ought to be at the head of the large inland bay which is Arcachon's chief feature.

It is a horrid sort of bay at low tide, for though fifty miles in circumference it is very shallow except in channels. The consequence is that the sea's recession leaves miles upon miles of nasty mud which, though first-rate for oysters—so it is reported, at

least—is not good for Christian nostrils. Yet there are houses thickly on the edge of the mud, and on long embankments built out into the bay. These last, however, are mainly concerned with the great local industries: oysters and sardines. And verily, though offensive, this stink of sun-baked mud cannot be very insalubrious, for the natives have an air of health that it does one good to observe.

Turned loose at length in Arcachon's red railway station, we were at once beset by the numerous itinerant vendors of things who assemble at all popular resorts. We had not pushed our way twenty paces down the plane-shaded avenue towards ere we had our hands full of cards, inviting us to dine at a score of different places at so much or so little a head. And on all these cards the famous Arcachon oysters were vaunted—as a supreme attraction. In the little booths by our side, too, were mahogany-hued folks, aproned and smiling, with tubs of oysters before them. I hope I may trust my memory when I avow that for a franc a man might eat fifty of the bivalves, and still leave a good profit to his host.

Thus we came to the summer town's main street, a long pleasant thoroughfare trending parallel to the shore. Here was life enough, with a vengeance. Thousands of excursionists had preceded us this day. They were breakfasting in leafy arbours, in shaded courtyards, and in the large balcony rooms of the hotels. They were strolling provisionally up and down, like ourselves, uttering ejaculations, looking in the shop-windows, or reprimanding their errant offspring. They were riding on horseback or driving in chaises; or they were cycling, with heroic indifference to the crowd. A handsome blonde girl, in fawn-coloured uniform, wasp-like waist, and extremely bagged knickerbockers, flashed by on her machine without exciting more adverse comment than the cry, "How chic!" from several admiring—and probably envious—damsels of her own age. There was great cracking of whips from drivers, a resonant babble of voices, and the sharp clink of glasses in the adjacent cafés and plates in the restaurants.

But one sound we missed: the invigorating roar of protesting waves as they broke upon a shingly shore.

And yet we were close to Arcachon's beach, all the while. Of this we had petrifying admonition ere long. We were still in this main lung of the place, when a well-built gentleman in black and white

woollen pyjamas—and nothing else—which came no lower than mid-thigh, crossed the road in company with a pretty girl whose bathing dress was suggested rather than concealed by the loose over-robe she wore. They had both evidently come straight from the water—and were far from ashamed. I'm sure I don't know why they should have been ashamed; yet an English girl fresh from a bath would have died, I feel sure, rather than crossed, say, Piccadilly Circus in such a garb. But this girl was French, and had charming little feet—which makes all the difference.

Having thus got our clue to the shore, we diverged thither, and in a moment or two beheld a scene like Margate's and Rhyl's any fine August day. Like, yet with added features. The tide was on the ebb. Hundreds of boats were close in-shore or stranded, and between and among them hundreds of men and women and boys and girls were bathing indiscriminately. Others were running about or strolling towards their dressing-rooms, unconscious of the crowds of clothed pedestrians through which they had to make their way.

Mothers and fathers by the score had camped out on the soft sand, rigged up little screens against the sun, and disposed themselves for calm spectacular happiness in the midst of their eager, bare-legged children. They were eating, drinking, or smoking, or methodically inhaling what they perchance believed to be pure undefiled ozone. As a picture, it was good; and not altogether commonplace.

Arcachon's chief hotels are built with large dining-rooms abutting on Arcachon's sands. This is convenient and gay. We breakfasted thus at the "Richelieu," with a harpist trilling melodies in our midst. Lounging and bathing mortals on the yellow sands were our foreground; beyond was the radiant shrinking water, with staked islets momentarily uncovering themselves here and there in the Bay; and on all sides of the enclosed water space black pines made a solemn but far from depressing girdle.

We enjoyed a tolerable breakfast, and the society of fellow-guests some of whom were very entertaining. It is the vogue here for the ladies to wear bonnets of the kind Millais gives his little two-year-old children on canvas. The effect is in some cases winsome; in others grotesque. But I shall not soon forget the impression made upon me by a certain young wife with large blue eyes in such a headgear. She came in to breakfast still damp from

her bath, and looking as if Neptune had done her good. With her was her husband, a tall, debilitated young man. They did not appear well matched, these two. There was a certain look of contempt for her spouse in the young wife's steady blue eyes; nor did they interchange more than a word or two during the meal. Yet I dare say theirs was a commonplace history enough. It has its counterpart in England also—though more seldom, and with, as a rule, more regard for appearances.

Other ladies in these babies' bonnets proved gruesome delusions. Seen from behind—their heads totally concealed—they were, perhaps, seducing; but when you came cheek by jowl with them, they were old, or more than middle-aged, with, like as not, undisguised powder on their heated faces.

What struck us most, here—for we were innocent Britons, with British prudery fast rooted in our prejudiced breasts—was the shameless way in which the ladies, or at least the women, bared their legs to paddle in the fringe of Arcachon Bay's little dribbling waves. It was a spectacle to appal some of our country people; but it was taken quite as a matter of course at Arcachon.

Can you conceive anything more ludicrous in its way than a demure spectacled matron of fifty with her clothes pinned up like a child's, attended by a portly husband, likewise barelegged, and all their children—rather more than barelegged—thus dabbling in the water; ever and anon uttering little squeals as they tread on a shell or a crab's leg, and ever and anon stooping to fish forth some trivial wonder from beneath the translucent surface of the water?

There were several amateur photographers on the beach. A more curious array of subjects they could not have had. But, as a matter of fact, they made their pictures without smiling. There was nothing abnormal in the scenes; they were just vignettes of French watering-place life, that is all.

The sun was mighty hot on these honey-combed sands—broken into holes for the repose of family parties—and we at length turned our backs upon them. Besides, really, to tell the truth, I did not feel at all sure about the sanitary condition of this people's playground. There were interjacent patches of black ooze about the sand which both looked and smelt alarmingly like drainage matter come to light from below, as if it were more interested in overhead life than the pipes that were—let us surmise—constructed specially to

carry it into the feeding-ground of the oysters. And so we traversed the town again, and made for the cool territory of the pines.

Ah, those pines! They are the true glory of Arcachon. Without them it would be an unsatisfactory sort of place; with them it is dignified and made romantic to boot.

There is the seaside Arcachon and the woodland Arcachon. The one is the summer town, and the other the winter health resort.

In the summer town you live and move and have your hot being in hotels, unless you are a rich wine-merchant or a successful financier, and can afford one of the very few exquisite little villas which compete with the big hotels for a sea front. These are altogether lovely, vying almost with the residences on Riviera for attractiveness. One we saw which we envied much. It was of red brick with dainty turrets, having well-grown trees in its little garden, glass-houses, and an especially snug seat with bear-skins spread over it. A graceful stone balcony with a bower at one corner formed its boundary on the seaward side, and private steps gave its happy inmates private access to the water at all states of the tide. But there were not many like it.

In the forest, however, there is no town, only a congeries of chalets set at random on the sand, with the dark green pines round them like pins on a pin-cushion. The atmosphere is turpentine, and therefore good; and there is excellent shade from the ardent southern sun.

The chalets here are named like one's own babies. We saw the names Henrietta, Theresa, James, Alphonse, Jasmin, Mary, and so forth. Bright little residences they are, too, with their red tiles and varnished woodwork; bijou as bijou can be. Environ them with the light-coloured sand, the green of the woods, and the blue of the Arcachon sky, and you have an idea of the kaleidoscopic beauty of the place.

Here, too, is the Casino, a garish scarlet and yellow concern in the Moorish style. It was shut in September, but its terrace was accessible, and the view therefrom, if not as dazzling as that from the Monte Carlo gardens, was yet exhilarating. It was, at any rate, better than the view of the Casino itself, which made me think of a fantastically congealed clot of blood, monstrously magnified. Yet it were unfair to hint even at any real deadliness in this red and yellow construction. Though they gamble a little here as in all Continental

Casinos, I don't know that any man has ever cut his throat or shot or hanged himself at Arcachon as a sequel to his money losses.

One of the most piquant of our little glimpses of "bourgeois" life here at Arcachon was due to the Observatory, a view point near the Casino. We were drinking lager beer at fivepence the glass under the trees, when two weary women came up with three small children, tear-stained, and evidently on their part also oppressed by the pain of too much pleasuring at a bout. The sight of the Observatory staircase—a corkscrew—at once raised the spirits of the youngsters and correspondingly stirred the anxieties of the ladies.

There was a wordy debate as to the advisability of allowing the eldest daughter to ascend such a staircase. The damsel was about ten. She bullied her relatives into giving their consent, and sprang off gleefully. Then uprose a tempest of wails from the other children—a miss of seven and a boy of eight. The latter developed temper, and, removing from his family circle, sat apart on the end of a form, which instantly tilted and turned him head over heels in the neatest manner in the world.

We smoked and drank, and contemplated—with masculine hard-heartedness—the scene that then ensued. Having such excellent added pretext for wailing, the boy made the welkin ring. They searched his head for bruises, but found none. Nevertheless he made the woods echo, and was bandaged with all the pocket-handkerchiefs available. And the little miss also, with one finger in her mouth, bellowed exceedingly while she followed with longing eyes the diminishing form of her sister up above.

"Mais, mam'selle," cried one of the harassed women at length, turning upon the infant in a pet, "c'est impossible, parfaitement impossible, pour vous à faire la girandole comme ça!"

The error of logic was, however, evident to the little lass, and she continued her wails. We left them still wailing.

It were a mistake to leave Arcachon without eating some of its oysters. We made a light, unorthodox repast off a couple of dozen of them—at a halfpenny each—somewhere about four o'clock. They do not, for all their fame, compare favourably with our dear friends of Whitstable—to which, indeed, they are pigmies. But, considering all things—their foreign origin among other reasons; for one must be prejudiced—they are not to be scorned.

Returning from the railway station in the evening was like being in the crowd of a Lord Mayor's Day. Such an unmannerly hustling for places, such beseeching, and—I am sorry to add—such strong language! But there must be some drawback to an excursion of this kind, else its more enjoyable parts would lose some of the charm they get from mere contrast.

The sun went down behind the forest while yet we were among the trees. It was the colour of a blood orange, and it left long crimson and amber streamers trailing athwart the pale turquoise empyrean for many minutes afterwards.

RICHENDA.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "The Thirteenth Brydala," "Catherine Maidment's Burden," "Benefit of Clergy," "The Vicar's Aunt," etc. etc.

CHAPTER XV.

"SIR RODERICK GRAEME."

While his name was thus announced in stentorian tones by a manservant, Sir Roderick stood on the threshold and glanced hither and thither into the room before him in search of his hostess. It was a large drawing-room, and it was brilliantly lighted with electric light. The light was saved from being too glaring by soft shades of a pale green which harmonised well with the darker green of the wall decoration. And this last made a good background for the groups of figures moving about the room; figures of men in well-appointed evening dress, and of women in every possible variety of what they themselves would have called "smart gowns." Stands of flowers and ferns were arranged here and there along the walls, and they softened the contrasting colours of the dresses, and broke the straight outlines of the room.

It was a really pretty scene; prettier, indeed, than most evening parties, because everything was so well arranged for producing a good effect. But Sir Roderick Graeme gave neither look nor thought to the scene itself. He only scanned it to discover the one person who was not, it seemed, discoverable at the moment—his hostess. She was not in her conventional place at the entrance of the room. Her guest had arrived very late, which accounted for this, but it did not account for her non-appearance now.

Sir Roderick was just wondering what course he should take, when suddenly,

from a group on his left hand, a figure disengaged itself and came towards him. Sir Roderick's eyes fell upon it, and he gave a little start. It was the figure of a slight, graceful woman. She was dressed in pink silk, with some soft stuff about it of a pale blue. Pink was the colour of the season, and this dress was the most fashionable shade of pink; its cut had already made half the women in the room envious and dissatisfied because their own dresses were not also French. Her soft brown hair was dressed very elaborately and fastened with a diamond star; a diamond pendant rose and fell on her beautiful white neck. Her cheeks were glowing with a soft colour which put the paint on many faces in the room to shame, and as she came towards Sir Roderick her large eyes sparkled almost as brilliantly as her diamonds.

"I thought you were going to treat me as you've treated me hitherto," she said, in a soft but excited voice. "I'd given you up, Sir Roderick, as a matter of fact; and that's why I didn't hear your name. I shouldn't have heard it now if Mr. Kennaway hadn't told me that you were looking for me."

"I've been in Scotland," he said, by way of answer to the first part of her address. "I'm awfully sorry," he added, as response to the second.

"I know you've been in Scotland," she said, laughing lightly. "You sent all your answers to my invitations from thence. But what I ask is, why stay there all this time? In this fearful weather, too!"

She gave a little affected shiver which nearly brought her pretty shoulders out of her dress, and which was certainly unnecessary. No cold breath from the January snow which sprinkled the street outside had found, or could find, its way into those well-warmed rooms. Sir Roderick did not seem to hear what was being said to him. He was gazing, almost staring, at the small, brilliant figure before him; and the look that was growing clearer and clearer was a look of perplexed amaze.

"Have you looked enough at my frock?"

Sir Roderick started, and stammered an incoherent word or two of apology. His hostess laughed.

"There's no need to apologise!" she said lightly. "I hope you like it. I like it myself. I think it very chic." She paused for an instant and looked up at him. "Now," she said, "I've given you no less than three distinct leads, Sir

Roderick, and you haven't risen to the occasion with one single compliment! I suppose this is what comes of vegetating in Scotland."

Sir Roderick looked at the radiant figure before him, and hesitated. He seemed to be looking for words.

But the necessity for words was suddenly taken away. The pretty pink-draped figure turned, sharply, as if in response to a summons from behind.

"Yes?" she said interrogatively.

Just behind her stood a man who nodded carelessly to Sir Roderick. It was Fergus Kennaway.

"I want to introduce Cameron to you, Miss Leicester," he said. "You'll come with me?"

With a little smile to Sir Roderick, Miss Leicester turned away at once, and swept away into the moving groups, at Fergus Kennaway's side.

Sir Roderick was left standing alone; he looked like a sort of human rock in the middle of the light, and chatter, and movement around him; for he made no attempt to move away from the place where Miss Leicester had left him. He stared, with blank amaze in his look, over the heads of the people at the vanishing pink-draped figure. Some one brushed against him and begged his pardon, and then Sir Roderick became aware that he was very much in the way in his present position. He gave an odd sort of gasp, and retreated to a wall, where he leaned back, his eyes fixed, it seemed, on space. He made no effort to make conversation, or even to discover any acquaintances. He just simply stood silent and motionless, watching the roomful as if it had been a theatre and he the spectator at a play. Quite unconsciously he gave a sigh; a rather heavy one.

"I say," said a cheerful voice at his side, "can I do anything for you?"

Sir Roderick, innocently unaware of what had given rise to these words, looked round with some astonishment.

"I beg your pardon?" he said questioningly.

Beside him was a boy whose age might have been about seventeen. He was tall, and possessed the rather overgrown look common with tall boys, and his faultless evening dress seemed to set a trifle uneasily on him. He had a rather pale face, much freckled, and good-humoured, very intelligent eyes.

"Oh, I thought you seemed bored," he

explained frankly; "and I might perhaps introduce you to somebody or do something. Richie said I was to look after the people all I could. I'm Jack Leicester," he added.

Sir Roderick turned abruptly and held out his hand.

"Oh!" he said. "I know your sister."

"I know you do. I saw you talking to her just as Kennaway——" the pale face darkened heavily and suddenly—"walked her off. Don't you hate all this sort of thing?" he demanded abruptly.

"What sort of thing?"

"Oh, parties! They are the most fearful rot, to my mind. I suppose women like them, though. Richie's mad on them. I'm sure I wish she wouldn't be. We've seen so little of her."

"You are living with Miss Leicester?"

"Of course. Look here, what do you think of some supper? I see some people going down. And I must go and find a girl or some one. You just come after me."

Mechanically Sir Roderick moved, and as his cheery escort made his way through the people towards the doorway, he followed him equally mechanically.

"Sir Roderick!"

He had not reached the head of the staircase when the exclamation arrested him. The voice that spoke was loud and high-pitched, and the owner was very much over-dressed. He turned and shook hands with Mrs. Fitzgerald. Jack Leicester, who had gone a few steps down the staircase, turned to his new friend with an almost imperceptible nod, by which he meant to arrange that Sir Roderick should bring Mrs. Fitzgerald down. Sir Roderick, however, had already arranged matters in his own mind. He proposed himself to Mrs. Fitzgerald as her escort, and was accepted.

They squeezed slowly down the crowded stair in silence; speaking was out of the question during the process. It was not until Sir Roderick had established her comfortably at a little table, and found for her the special viands she requested, that Mrs. Fitzgerald was prepared to enter into any conversation. But these preliminaries being over, she was evidently prepared for a great deal.

"Isn't this absolutely ridiculous?" she said, as Sir Roderick placed himself opposite to her at the little round table.

"Isn't what ridiculous?" he said absently.

"That you and I should meet each other

in the house of this girl? That I should accept hospitality from a young woman who has been my paid servant? It's absurd, you know; utterly absurd! But what can one do when every one does it?"

"Miss Leicester is popular, then?"

"Popular! Why, where in the world——

Oh, I remember, you've been dawdling in Scotland, so you have! She got into society with a rush that takes my breath away. Horrid, scheming girl!"

Mrs. Fitzgerald moderated her voice so very slightly that Sir Roderick glanced around him in some alarm. Mrs. Fitzgerald caught the glance and laughed loudly.

"Don't be afraid," she said. "I'll take the responsibility of my words if they're heard. She knows I can't endure her. I suppose this is the first time you have been here, then?"

"Yes, it is."

"You're very monosyllabic!" Mrs. Fitzgerald looked up from her plate quickly, as if a sudden thought had struck her. "You weren't taken with the heiress when she was my pretty nurse, were you? Don't tell me that she's made a fool of you as she has of Kennaway."

Mrs. Fitzgerald's voice was harsher than ever; from her small eyes shot a quick gleam, and her lips moved as with a spasm of uncontrollable feeling. But she repressed the signs before Sir Roderick could possibly have observed them.

"Kennaway?" Sir Roderick spoke quickly. "Are they—is she——"

"They're not engaged—yet," said Mrs. Fitzgerald, "but they've both made good use of their time since she came to live in the world, and every one expects it daily, now."

"But——"

Sir Roderick did not seem able to get on with his sentence. He ended it by biting hard at his moustache.

"I do assure you that, where Miss Leicester is concerned, there seem to be no buts," said Mrs. Fitzgerald. "She gives him the most open encouragement, and has done all along. I shall always believe she meant to catch him when she was with me—always. Scheming to the finger-tips, as I say. I've not told you now, that I am certain she put the paragraph in the papers herself."

"What paragraph?"

Sir Roderick was playing idly with a fork as he spoke. But his supper lay untasted on his plate.

"I'm sure she is capable of it, at any

rate," went on Mrs. Fitzgerald, in an aggressively defiant tone.

She had either not heard Sir Roderick's question at all, or she was too engrossed in her subject to pause to answer it.

"She's capable of anything! Do you know, she has no chaperon to speak of—that is to say, only a middle-aged nonentity who scarcely ever shows herself. She's nowhere visible to-night, for instance; that is, I've not seen her, and I call it most forward of Miss Leicester to receive every one unsupported. But——"

"What is the paragraph you spoke of?"

Sir Roderick's question was repeated in a rather insistent tone. Perhaps Mrs. Fitzgerald noticed that fact, perhaps she suddenly remembered that he had asked it before. At any rate, she overlooked his interruption, and answered him forthwith.

"Oh, an idiotic paragraph that went the round of all the smart papers," she said. "'A young lady's startling change of position,' and so forth. They all called her a governess. I suppose nurse would have sounded incredible. It's in life that the incredible things happen, you see. People got interested, of course; they're all fools; and no sooner had she taken a good house than she was overwhelmed with callers. And goodness only knows who hasn't taken the girl up!"

Mrs. Fitzgerald let the spoon which she had been using fall with a clatter on her plate, and rose from the table with an impatient gesture.

"Come and help me forget the whole idiotic affair," she said, in an irritated voice. "It exasperates me at times more than I can bear. Come and tell me when you can lunch with me. And tell me why you have been secluding yourself such ages in Scotland. It's horribly unsociable of you, I do think."

Mrs. Fitzgerald had spoken the last few words over her shoulder to Sir Roderick, who was following her out of the supper-room to the foot of the stairs. He could not have answered her during their ascent of them, however much he might have wished to do so. For a crush of people separated them temporarily, and obliterated his view of Mrs. Fitzgerald's glittering green and silver brocade dress. He could not rejoin her until they had reached the head of the stairs. As he did so they were exactly opposite the door leading into the drawing-room. It was only separated from them by the breadth of the narrow landing. Just inside the doorway, with the dark

outlines of the door-frame making a piquant setting for her brilliant face and pink-draped figure, was their hostess, Richenda Leicester. Beside her, evidently about to take her down to supper, was Fergus Kennaway. His dark face was full of a sort of careless triumph. Hers, radiant, flushed, and excited, was triumphant also. She slipped her hand into Fergus Kennaway's arm as she caught sight of Mrs. Fitzgerald, and as they passed the other two she smiled excitedly.

"Hateful minx!" ejaculated Mrs. Fitzgerald, as she sank into a seat. "I should like to shake her!"

Sir Roderick's eyes were round and boyish in their wondering gaze; but his face was a trifle pale, and he said something under his breath—something which Mrs. Fitzgerald did not hear. The next instant he had flung himself on the seat beside her.

"How are Veronica and the others?" he said to her in a brisk, changed voice.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was several hours later; well on, in fact, into the small hours of the morning. All Miss Leicester's guests were gone; the front door had just closed behind the last, and the tired servants were fastening it with a little clattering noise. Miss Leicester herself stood on the landing outside the drawing-room door. Her eyes still sparkled brightly, and her face was still slightly flushed. Beside, with his arm thrown caressingly round her waist, was the pale-faced boy who had introduced himself to Sir Roderick as Jack Leicester. He was playing with her pretty hair with his other hand carelessly enough, but the intelligent eyes were scanning her face at the same time a trifle doubtfully.

"Don't, Jacky dear!" she said. "My hair will be so muddled!"

"I like it best muddled," was the cool response; "and there's no one else to see it just now, Richie dear, so I shall do as I choose."

"It's time you went to bed," she said, finding that protest was to avail her nothing.

"What about you?" the boy answered, laughing. "Isn't it time you went, too?"

"I think I'll wait until the servants have shut up," she said, rather wearily.

"All right; so you shall. But I see no reason why you should wait here in this identical spot! Come and sit over the smoking-room fire for a bit. It's jolly

warm in there; I saw to that. Come, and we'll have a private brew of mulled claret, or something, together. Come, there's a dear girl!"

He had unloosed his hold from her waist, and slipped his hand into her arm, and he tried gently, as he spoke, to draw her along the landing towards the room in question. She resisted, however.

"I must go and kiss the twins first, then," she said, disengaging her arm from his hand. "I promised them to go the instant moment the people were gone——"

"They're sound asleep," objected Jack.

"I hope and trust they are; but I should feel horrid if I broke my promise to them. I'll come back to you, if you like, I really will, if you'll let me go now."

"Honour bright!" he said reluctantly.

She nodded, smiling, and he released her. While he sauntered along the landing towards the smoking room, Miss Leicester turned, picked up the skirt of the pink dress, and ran quickly and lightly up a short flight of stairs. On the landing above, she paused for a moment; whatever she might have been thinking of drove from her pretty eyes all their sparkling light, leaving them soft, deep, and tender. She opened very softly a door on her right, and entered a large bedroom, lit only by the dimmest gaslight. It was simply, but very comfortably furnished. Every one of its fittings, from its wall-paper to the two narrow brass bedsteads that stood side by side in the middle of one wall, was the best possible thing of its kind. The tastes of the owners of the room were made evident in several different ways. Over one brass bedstead was a collection of photographs, taken in every possible attitude, of a Scotch terrier, who was himself reposing peacefully at the foot of the bed. Near the other, on a chest of drawers, were a quantity of small models, in cork and wood, of ships of every size and grade; while a highly-coloured picture of a man-of-war was pinned to the wall above. On a low shelf just inside the door were grouped two cages of canaries, and a glass-covered box full of silkworms, together with several closed and more mysterious receptacles.

Miss Leicester caught the pretty pink dress lightly round her, so that it might not rustle, and moved gently up the passage between the two brass bedsteads. Her eyes grew softer and more loving still, and a very sweet little smile curved her pretty mouth. She bent down gently over one bed, and smoothed back the ruffled hair of

its occupant, a boy of thirteen, from his forehead, and then very softly and gently she pressed on the forehead a long, loving kiss.

"Good night, Richie darling," murmured the boy. At the murmur, the other sleeper turned in his bed.

"You said you'd come," he muttered sleepily, "but you haven't kissed me."

"I'm going to, Bob dear." Miss Leicester was tucking the bed-clothes of the other bed carefully in as she spoke. When she had finished she turned to the second, and gave to the second boy just the same loving touch and caress she had given the first. He opened his eyes. "You've kept your promise, ducky!" he said gratefully, and he was asleep again before Miss Leicester's hand had left his hair. She tucked him up carefully, also, and then, with a smile that was at once protecting and tender, she caught up her dress again, and made her way on tip-toe out of the room, closing the door softly behind her.

She ran down the short flight of stairs, hurried along the landing, and opened the door of the smoking-room. It was a square room, not large, with a fireplace cutting off one corner, which gave it an unusual and comfortable look. By the fireplace, in a low basket-chair, Jack had established himself to wait for his sister. He rose at her entrance, and pulled forward for her a corresponding chair to his own.

"Here you are," he said cheerily. "That's right. We'll be as jolly as possible! Tired?" he added questioningly, as Miss Leicester sank down among the soft cushions rather slowly.

"No!" she said briskly. "I'm not tired. Parties never tire me. I love seeing people. I could set out for some one else's house now this minute, to another."

Jack gave a low whistle of dismay at the idea.

"Rather you than me!" he said emphatically. "But I'm awfully glad, since you like to, that you can have parties and go to them, Richie."

Miss Leicester was lying back at full length in her chair, her small feet in their pretty pink shoes just resting on the bright steel bar of the fender. She stretched up her arms and put her hands behind her head as her brother ended.

"So am I!" she said, with a contented sigh. But she said no more, and a silence fell between the brother and sister.

Jack had also stretched himself comfort-

ably in his chair. His arms were folded, and his keen eyes were fixed on the clear little fire in the grate. His sister's eyes were also fixed on the fire. But though to a casual observer they might seem to be obviously in unison, in reality the trains of thought which they were respectively pursuing were as far apart as possible.

Under the influence of her thoughts, the woman's cheeks glowed deeper and deeper, and her eyes grew strangely bright and excited; and she seemed to grow absolutely motionless as the minutes crept by so fixed was her pose.

The boy's face, meantime, betrayed the fact that his thoughts were by no means pleasant to him; for the good-humoured eyes were very cloudy and anxious, and lines of frowning consideration had marked themselves on his brow. He did not imitate his sister's motionless pose. He moved constantly, first crossing and then uncrossing his legs restlessly, while one of his hands was clasping and unclasping the arm of his chair. It was evident that he was irresolute and undecided; and from the way in which he glanced once or twice at his sister's pretty, silent form, it was further evident that the indecision in question was connected with her.

At last he pulled himself straight up in his chair, suddenly, and looked at his sister.

"Richie!" he said. "I say, Richie!"

Miss Leicester started and turned absently to her brother.

"Yes," she said vaguely. "Yes. What is it, Jack?"

The boy leaned over from his chair and took gentle hold of one of the pretty ringed hands that lay on his sister's lap. Something in the gesture and the boy's manner surprised her, evidently. She, too, drew herself up in her chair.

"Well, foolish boy," she said, "what do you want?"

"Richie"—the boy's manner was uncertain and almost diffident, yet beneath it there was an odd purposefulness that gave it something like dignity—"I've wanted to ask you something for a long time, and I've never seemed to get at you in peace. I'm afraid you won't much like it, but I must ask it. I want to know—I want you to tell me, if you have any definite intention in letting Mr. Kennaway monopolise you and hang about you as he does, and has done for weeks."

Miss Leicester was alert and attentive enough now. She had drawn her hand away from her brother, and was using both apparently to screen her face from the fire. But they also partly screened it from him.

"What do you mean, Jack?" she said. "Why do you want to know?"

"I do want to know," was the answer. "If you are angry I can't help it. Only tell me, Richie, do you like him as much as he thinks you do?"

Miss Leicester rose abruptly, kissed the top of her brother's head, and walked to the door.

"Perhaps I do and perhaps I don't," she said mockingly. "I'm going to bed, Jacky. Good night, dear boy."

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PRISONERS OF SILENCE.

By MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

Author of "A Fallant Ignorance," "A Mere Cypher,"
"Cross Currents," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XL.

THE bright spring weather continued. Day after day the sun shone down from skies whose glorious blue was only enhanced by the soft white clouds that floated leisurely across it. Day after day a mild south wind fanned the astonished world of London. Day after day trees and shrubs burst into fresh loveliness of green.

But to the house which was Mrs. Vallotson's home, sunshine brought no brightness. The spirit of spring seemed to pause on its very threshold, shadowed and chilled; and within, the sombre quiet brooded undisturbed.

The days of the week that was to intervene between Mrs. Vallotson's first interview with Dr. Grant and his second visit to her, wore out their weary length as the days that had preceded them had done; but that week, in its passing, seemed to be marked by a darker shade of gloom even than the weeks that had gone before. The routine of life went on as heretofore. North's comings and goings followed one another with their accustomed regularity. Mrs. Vallotson neither came nor went, but remained alone through the long sunny hours of spring as she had remained through the chill dark days of winter, holding communication with no one. The hours passed for her, as far as outward circumstances go, much as they had been wont to do. During the first months of her present life, she had spent long intervals in walking up and down the room in which she

happened to be, her monotonous footsteps making the only audible sound in the quiet house. Gradually, however, she had discontinued the habit. The morning saw her seated in the dining-room erect and still, a piece of needlework in her hand; with the afternoon she passed to the drawing-room, her occupation unchanged. But during the present week her work made little progress. She would sit for an hour at a time, her needle idle in her hand, her eyes fixed on vacancy, gloomy and absorbed.

It would have been difficult to say, during this week, that there was any definite alteration in her manner; still more difficult to reduce such alteration to words. And yet some change there was. She seemed to be affected by a restlessness, rendered very painful to watch by the relentless grip in which it was suppressed; and, as though the effort of suppression strained her nerves almost beyond endurance, the sullen stillness of her demeanour was faintly stirred now and then, in her intercourse with North, by a smothered flash of fierceness.

North saw the change in her and acquiesced in it with a keen pang. The evidences of the depth of her aversion from himself; the uncontrollable shudder into which his entrance into a room now and then surprised her; the sharp intolerance that would ring for an instant in her voice; the glance of unspeakable repulsion; cut him to the heart, even while he told himself sadly that they revealed to him nothing of which he was not already aware. He understood that such breaches in her self-control were the result of suspense. He understood that suspicions as to her own state had been knocking at the door of her consciousness for weeks past, and that her interview with the doctor had given them admittance. No word on the subject of that

interview passed between the mother and son; not the most distant reference to it passed Mrs. Vallotson's lips; and North respected her silence. Until that second visit had been paid, certainty was impossible; and nothing less than certainty could help her.

More courteous, more considerate than it had been before, it was hardly possible for North's manner to her to become. But it altered slightly. A gentleness which was almost tender, came to it; a gentleness which sat on his grave demeanour as delicacy of touch sits sometimes on a man's powerful hands.

The week dragged itself away at last. The morning of the day which it had brought dawned bright and sunny like its predecessors. For one moment, as he rose from the cheerless breakfast-table, and turned to leave the still, grey-looking woman alone, North paused. He stood with his hand upon the door, and looked across the room at her, hesitating.

"Grant is to come to you to-day?" he said.

"Yes."

The monosyllable fell cold; her face as she answered him softened not by a shade. And North, with his heart aching heavily, could only turn away and leave her.

Two hours passed, and Mrs. Vallotson occupied them as usual, sitting sewing in the dining-room. The mechanical movement of her fingers never ceased. Then the door-bell rang. There was a man's tread in the hall and on the stairs, and the servant opened the dining-room door.

"Dr. Grant is in the drawing-room, ma'am," she said.

"Very well."

The woman withdrew, and Mrs. Vallotson rose deliberately.

For a moment her face twitched slightly. Then she went upstairs.

More than half an hour passed before the drawing-room bell rang, and the doctor came downstairs again, a slight pucker on his lined forehead. And when he had left the house, Mrs. Vallotson did not return to the dining-room and her needlework. She remained alone in the drawing-room, with the door fast closed, and the stillness over the house was as the stillness of death.

The luncheon bell sounded at last, and it was followed by so long a pause, that the servant was wondering whether Mrs. Vallotson had heard it, and questioning whether or no she should go upstairs to her, when the drawing-room door opened, and

slowly, with something difficult and halting about her step though her carriage was as erect as ever, Mrs. Vallotson came down. Her face was drawn, and in her eyes lurked a sombre fire to be wholly defined neither as horror nor defiance, though it partook of both those characteristics.

Her solitary lunch was rarely more than a form, and to-day it was gone through with exactly as usual. When it was over she rose and went, with the same slow step, back to the drawing-room. And silence fell once more upon the house.

An hour later the front-door bell rang again. It was a sound seldom heard, and the careless wonder with which the servant obeyed its summons was quickened into curiosity when she saw a carriage standing before the door, and on the step a lady.

"Is Mrs. Vallotson at home?"

The clear, rather peremptory voice vibrated strangely; and the woman, influenced instantly by that subtle something which innate refinement and the habit of command never fail to create, hesitated, and scanned the speaker with furtive respect.

"Mrs. Vallotson is in, ma'am," she said uncertainly. "But she—I don't think she receives visitors, if you'll excuse me."

"I have come to see her," was the answer, and with a quick, nervous grace of movement, before which the servant instinctively fell back, Mrs. Vallotson's visitor passed into the hall.

It was Lady Karslake.

From that meeting with North Branton—that meeting for which she had hungered and yearned for six long months—Eve Karslake had come forth haunted.

Her pain, and her passionate intolerance of that pain, remained—or so she thought—untouched. She had seen him again. She had heard his voice, and looked into his face; and though she told herself dearly that the world was only darker for that moment's light; that to relieve the poignancy of her self-humiliation was to intensify, if it were possible, the weary ache of her love; she had nevertheless brought something from that interview which she had not brought to it. She had come away haunted by the thought, not of her own anguish, not of the man she loved, but of the woman by whom both their lives had been wrecked.

During those last six months, as she had said to North Branton, the barest recollection of Mrs. Vallotson had affected her with a sense of intolerable insult. Before the realisation of the hideous relation in which North Branton's mother stood to her, all

her womanly pride shrank and quivered as sensitive nerves under the touch of red-hot iron. From the moment when the blow fell upon her to the moment when she met North Branston again, six months later, Mrs. Vallotson's place in the background of her mind had been that of the horrible means by which her life and North's had been brought to ruin. With the pitiful knowledge conveyed to her in the Green Park, Mrs. Vallotson had suddenly presented herself before her mental vision no longer as an abstract and malignant force, but as a woman; a woman doomed to suffering and death.

Lady Karslake resented the change at first fiercely. She turned her back upon the too persistent thought. She would not look at it; she would not own it. But it was not to be put aside. She was a woman to her finger-tips. If a woman's passion were easily touched in her, so also were womanhood's best graces. The thought of that lonely life oppressed her day and night. The solitude of the long days, the desolation involved in meeting suffering and death un comforted by womanly sympathy, were an ever present picture with her.

The quality of mercy blesses him who gives no less than him who takes, and even in those first involuntary movements of her compassion, something of its blessing touched Eve Karslake. Little as she realised it, the burden of her own suffering lessened from the moment when she recognised the suffering of another. Little by little, fiercely struggled against, vague impulses to relieve began to flash across her mind. Impulses only; the outcome of no conscious principle, no magnanimous reasoning; but impulses having their rise in a spirit intrinsically capable of that greatest of sacrifices—the yielding up of a just resentment. And such an impulse had driven her at last to Mrs. Vallotson's side.

Her breath was coming short and quick as she stood there in the hall; and she was trembling very much. Impulses are unreliable things. Though they hold good in themselves, they offer no protection against the assaults of revulsion. They are no barrier against the rush of memories which may render their behests a terror.

"I do not wish you to announce me," she said to the servant; she was controlling herself—as a very nervous person will sometimes do in moments of great excitement—so absolutely that the woman only thought her voice a little odd. "If you will show me the room I will go in alone."

She paused a moment and a rush of faint colour flooded her face to leave it instantly whiter than before. "Your master is not at home, I believe?" she said.

"No, ma'am."

"When do you expect him?"

"He usually gets in about half-past six, ma'am."

"Very well. Show me the way, please."

The woman hesitated; but so confident was the command that her uncertainty sank before it. She turned and led the way upstairs. On the first landing she stopped, indicating the drawing-room door.

"This room, ma'am," she said.

She spoke involuntarily in an undertone.

Lady Karslake moved swiftly forward, opened the door, and entered the room, shutting the door quickly behind her as she did so.

The sound of her entrance was followed instantly by a faint rustle at the other end of the room. Mrs. Vallotson was sitting in a large chair facing away from the door, looking straight before her, her figure a little bent as if under the compulsion of a paroxysm of pain. She turned her head sharply as the door opened, though the grip of her fingers on the arm of her chair did not relax.

One of the blinds was drawn down, and the light which fell upon the door, close against which Lady Karslake stood, was dim and uncertain. Mrs. Vallotson's senses seemed to move slowly. For a long moment she remained motionless, not recognising her visitor; unable even, as it seemed, to resent so unprecedented an intrusion. Then gradually the truth dawned upon her. Her eyes, which had rested on Lady Karslake's face with a dull unmeaning stare, began to live; her hands unclasped themselves slowly and with difficult deliberation, and she rose to her feet.

"What do you want?"

The words fell on the stillness of the room, weighted with a deadly force of defiance. Lady Karslake moved, her face still quivering beneath the rush of conflicting emotions which had swept across it during the pause, and took two or three steps towards the dark figure that confronted her. Then, as she drew nearer to it, she stopped suddenly.

The change that had come to the face into which she looked, since she had seen it last, was so tremendous that it struck her for the moment motionless and speechless. The fearful havoc, mental and physical, to which those gaunt features

witnessed, the ravages wrought by bodily pain, the still more obvious and ghastly ravages wrought by passion, came upon her as a shock for which she was utterly unprepared. A wave of pity and horror swept over her, lifting even the impulse which had brought her there on to another and a higher plane.

Her sudden stop, her agitated and tremulous silence, seemed to give the advantage to the strength that faced her. Mrs. Vallotson paused a moment, a cold, personal aversion showing faintly in her eyes. And then she repeated her question.

"What do you want?"

With her fingers catching and holding one another, with her colour coming and going painfully, Lady Karslake answered in a low, uneven voice:

"I—have come to see you."

"Why?"

"I thought—I hoped——"

"Did you suppose your presence would give me pleasure?"

Every heavy syllable was penetrated with such an unspeakable venom of contempt, as penetrated even through Lady Karslake's agitation. It startled her into self-control. She paused, and when she spoke again her manner had altered. It was very gentle, but there was a touch of dignity about it.

"Pleasure, perhaps, is a thing of the past for both of us," she said. "But I have hoped that we might lighten one another's pain. Can we not try, at least?"

"No!"

Mrs. Vallotson did not move. She uttered the gloomy implacable syllable, and the two stood face to face in silence.

Sharp as had always been the contrast between the, between the woman of innate refinement and the woman of innate vulgarity; between the woman of susceptibilities and the woman of iron; it had never asserted itself as it asserted itself now. They stood there close together, and between them, deeper and more unbridgeable than any gulf of circumstance, lay the gulf of temperament—that saddest of all barriers that separates man from man. Each woman felt it: Mrs. Vallotson with a sullen satisfaction, Lady Karslake with a vague distress that struggled with an equally vague aversion.

It was Lady Karslake who broke the silence, and her sense of the barrier against which she had to work showed itself in an added gentleness and charm of manner.

"Will you not think again?" she said. "You are very much alone. May I not

come sometimes and see you? I have heard——" she hesitated a moment—"I have heard that you are not quite well——"

She paused, stopped instinctively by the change, slight enough in itself, which passed across the face into which she looked. It was a very singular change. There was a moment's dead silence, and then Mrs. Vallotson spoke.

"So you are in the habit of seeing my son?"

There was that in the tone in which the words were uttered, there was that in the very brutality of the insult they conveyed, that rendered the speech the reckless, instinctive self-relief of a woman in whom the hidden source of the bitterness by which she is consumed is suddenly and unconsciously touched. But Lady Karslake, quivering under the gratuitous cruelty of the speech, was no more capable of reading the motive which had dictated it than if a physical blow had actually stunned her. She faced Mrs. Vallotson for an instant, her eyes dilated with pain and amazement. And then her innate dignity came to her relief.

"I have seen your son once," she said, and she said no more.

A low, crackling laugh broke from Mrs. Vallotson.

"So that is it!" she said. "That is the meaning of the charitable visit. You have agreed to tolerate me—you and he together, I suppose—because I haven't long to live. I am the object of your kind compassion now that I shall not trouble you much longer. Keep your compassion till I ask for it!"

There was a rough power about the last words; there was a rough power about the desperation of her face; the power of a creature which makes its last stand on its own strength. And a low cry broke from Lady Karslake.

"Ah, no!" she said. "No! no!"

With her face working convulsively, hardly conscious, in the outburst of supreme defiance and despair by which her long stillness was shaken, how or where she struck, Mrs. Vallotson turned upon her fiercely.

"I've got to die!" she cried, "I know that well enough. But I can die without your help or his! And when I'm dead you won't get rid of me, remember that. Don't count too much upon my death. It will do nothing for you! Nothing!"

"Ah, don't!" cried Lady Karslake sharply. "Don't talk like that! Don't think like that! I'll go."

Trembling in every limb, and pale as death, she hurried out of the room, down the stairs, and out of the house to her carriage. The front door fell to behind her with a heavy thud, and as the sound died away, for the second time that day a stillness fell upon the house which was as the stillness of death.

DOWN CHEAPSIDE.

Noon, the hour of noon, sounds melodiously from the great bell of Bow, and the vibrations of the several strokes hum above the heads of the crowds in Cheapside, and join in the soft clamour of innumerable other bells that strike the hour, audible in momentary intervals of the hurly-burly of traffic in the great thoroughfare. To-day there is neither fog nor slush in Cheapside, and pale winter sunshine lights up the house-tops and upper storeys, and filters down into the narrow lanes and side streets, and gives a touch of brightness to the vague and misty vistas that it cannot penetrate.

There are all the elements of a handsome street about Cheapside. It does not aspire to grandeur. Were its buildings immense, the street might look narrow; as it is, the proportions, the contour of it are all in harmony, and Wren's beautiful tower of the Church of St. Mary-le-Bow gives the street an air of distinction that is lacking in more pretentious thoroughfares. Not that one gets any definite impression of the kind in a casual passage along Cheapside. Like a leaf on the surface of a mill-stream the pedestrian is whirled along, jostled and elbowed if standing for a moment to mark the scene around. But impressions received at many different seasons and times: at night, when the crowd has thinned and the pale electric beam shows everything in black and white; or cleared for some great procession, when the bells of the City have a chance of being heard in full clamour, and the street is hung with banners, while the windows rain down coloured advertisements; or in the calm of a summer Sunday morning, when ancient citizens might rise from beneath their carved monuments in the quiet City churches, and take their seats, in ruffs and doublets, in the solemn carved-oak pews without disturbing reminders of the flight of ages; all this recalled in the whirl and bustle of to-day, gives us a kind of nodding acquaintance with Cheapside, new and old.

In Cheapside we have the central avenue

of the old City market that our Saxon ancestors called the Chepe, and that likely enough was held under and outside the wall of the old Roman city; and may have existed even before the old wall, as a roadside market along old Watling Street. And so in Cheapside we have the place where the chapmen might place their booths and expose their wares; while a little further on is the Poultry, where the countrywomen sat with their baskets of fowls and eggs. Then with the backbone of the market in Cheapside, other rows of stalls formed the nuclei of future streets. The bakers sold their loaves in Bread Street, and were, in the days of the Plantagenets, forbidden to sell their bread elsewhere. Friday Street belonged to the fishmongers, whose chief market was on that day. Wood Street may have served for the firewood dealers, and Milk Street speaks for itself. Ironmonger Lane was long the head-quarters of the hardware trade, and Sopars Lane, just opposite—now and since the great fire of 1666 known as Queen Street—was held by the dealers in soap and candles.

As time went on the chapmen waxed rich and became shopmen, their wooden booths were turned into substantial gabled houses. But before then, there had been tournaments held in the great market-place, and a high time for the 'prentice lad of Chaucer's time:

For when there any riding was in Chepe,
Out of the shoppe thither would he lepe.

Dan Chaucer might himself have witnessed the famous tournament in Chepe, when Queen Philippa beheld the sports from a balcony built about the tower of old Bow Church. Unluckily the temporary platform collapsed, and the Queen and her ladies tumbled upon the heads of knights and lordlings who were crowded beneath, and who thus broke the fall of the fair ones, but at the expense of a broken head for more than one faithful knight.

Where the lists were marked out stood the high cross of Chepe—one of the five crosses erected in memory of Queen Eleanor, whose body rested there on the night before its interment in the Abbey. At the other end of the barriers stood the old conduit that on festivals and City pageants often ran with red and white wine. There was a fountain, too, at the City Standard opposite Honey Lane, and a smaller conduit near the high cross; and these structures survived to times comparatively modern. Ere Elizabeth's reign had commenced, streets and houses were aligned pretty much as they are now, and

Cheapside made a gallant show with its tall timbered houses rising stage over stage, with quaint gables and carved beams and panels, and curiously wrought brackets of iron, and golden signs that swung overhead for every trade that was carried on below. The pride of Chepe and City alike was Goldsmith's Row on the south side of the street, next the Poultry, and devoted to workers and dealers in gold and silver. Brave was the show of plate outside, of silver bowls and mazers, of flagons and dishes parcel gilt, while the Row itself, framed in old oak timber, and jutting out, storey over storey, was like cabinet-work in its richness and finish. And on festivals or some Royal visit the whole street would be arrayed in the brightest apparel, the mercers hanging out their richest stuffs, and every house showing forth the richest carpets and hangings, while the churches displayed their silken banners and splendid vestments—all this a setting for some brilliant cavalcade of prancing horses and rich trappings, with gorgeous dames and statesmen old as the human element in the show.

Such scenes as these, and Cheapside itself, must have been familiar enough to Milton in his boyhood. For he was born and spent his early years in Bread Street, right under Bow Bells, whose chimes must have often been his lullaby. His father lived under the sign of the "Spread Eagle," in Bread Street, and was a money scrivener, and close by was the Church of All Hallows, where the babe John was baptized. The old church, with its homely tower, perished in the great fire, and its successor, a comely building by Wren, had grown old too, and was quaintly conspicuous in quiet Bread Street, with its clock, and mural tablet that reproduced John Dryden's eulogy of the great poet, beginning: "Two poets, in two distant ages born." All this was to be seen in the seventies, but in the nineties it is to be seen no longer, for the church has perished; not by fire, but to make room for sale-rooms and warehouses. And here, at the corner, is actually a monument let into the wall, chronicling the existence and disappearance of the church and its memorials, and showing Milton's head in low relief. Add to this, that the big building which has replaced the old church, and possibly the scrivener's house, is called Milton House. This is all that is left to us of the poet, in the place where he must have gathered his early inspiration; for it is Cheapside, with its memories of tournaments and pageants, that suggests

Tower'd cities please us then,
And the busy hum of men,
Where throngs of knights and barons bold
In weeds of peace high triumphs hold.

Close by was the haunt of poets of an earlier time. For the famous "Mermaid Tavern" was in Bread Street, with a side entrance in Friday Street, where Shakespeare and Jonson must have met, and where Beaumont joined in the mighty contest of wit and dexterous repartee.

What things we have seen

Done at the Mermaid!

In Bread Street, too, was a house of the Staffords, Dukes of Buckingham, the last of whom we see on his way to the scaffold in Shakespeare's "King Henry the Eighth." Possibly the courtyard of this old mansion may be represented by Star Court, where now manufacturers and their agents much abound.

There is not much to be made out of Friday Street, with its warehouses and offices that suggest only business associations. But it was in Friday Street that Geoffrey Chaucer the poet was walking one day, when he saw a newly-painted sign, a bend or on a field of azure, which he recognised as the armorial of the Scropes, but which, he was told, belonged to a new knight of the county of Chester, Sir Robert Grosvenor hight. Hence a famous heraldic contest between the two families. But since this the Grosvenors have established themselves fairly well in London, chiefly by a marriage with one Miss Mary Davies, who brought all Pimlico as a portion. The Bend or, too, has been heard of on a field vert palisaded, to wit, a racecourse.

Our next cast in Bow Lane is more fortunate. Here is a touch of the picturesque, at the Cannon Street end, where a comely old church is planted, with a gateway and tombstones, and some old buildings forming a pleasant corner, and the lane winds up towards Cheapside with turns and elbows like any country lane; and there are courts and passages all about, and no lack of snug taverns where buyers and sellers may resort for friendly drinks, and where the country draper or the colonial storekeeper is often "run in" by persuasive seelermen. And as Chaucer said of the Cheapsider of his day,

He loved bet the tavern than the shoppe,

we may still find a few, perhaps, of the same persuasion. And up a quaint courtyard, closed at night by an ancient iron grille, there is a charming old-fashioned hotel, where one might be roused of a morning by the great bell of Bow, and

listen to the City chimes all round; those ancient voices, scarcely heard in the whirl and bustle of the day.

And then you come into Bow Churchyard, which concerns itself more with ladies' mantles than with the records of the dead. But the stately old church is open every day, and you may hear the deep notes of the great organ, now and then, that raise a faint echo in the crypt beneath. For this is St. Mary de Arcubus, or of the Arches, or the Bow if you like, and it is said that the old Court of Arches took its name from being held here. Anyhow, its foundations are buttressed deep in the soil of old London, and yet there are Roman foundations beneath it deeper still.

And now we come to Queen Street, which, when you have crossed Cheapside, becomes King Street, where you get a glimpse of the Guildhall—the venerable acropolis of the City—that crowns the vista. At this corner of Queen Street—then Sopar's Lane—next the Poultry, stood the mercer's shop of Baptist Hicks, and the wealth that was acquired in that shop has set up more than one noble family. Hicks himself—who built Hicks's Hall, the original Clerkenwell sessions house—was made Lord Campden, and his daughters, forming grand alliances, carried the fertilising stream of wealth in different directions. Cheapside, indeed, might be called the nursery of the peerage, and many a noble name owes its gilded coronet to the ward of Cheap.

The same corner, by the way, was at a later date the site of the print-shop of Alderman Boydell, a man to whom the school of English engraving owes very much. The Alderman, it is said, was an early riser, and every morning crossed Cheapside to the pump in Ironmonger Lane, and placing his wig on the ball at the top, sluiced his bald pate in the stream that rushed from the spout. But print-shop and pump have alike disappeared, although the Alderman's fame survives in his "Shakespeare" and other costly illustrated editions.

In this same Queen Street, or Sopar's Lane, stood Ringed Hall, a famous old house of the ancient Earls of Cornwall—one of whom for the good of his soul founded, in 1280, the Abbey of Bewley in Oxford, and gave his house in Sopar's Lane to the Abbot thereof. And close by, if not part of the ancient mansion, was "Ypres Inn," the resort of the merchants of that ilk in later but still ancient days.

After this Cheapside soon merges into the Poultry, with Bucklersbury to mark the dividing line. Says old Stow, when Walbrook was an open stream barges were towed up out of the Thames as far as Bucklersbury, and thus he accounts for "Barge Yard," a quiet little court in that thoroughfare. And he tells of "one ancient strong tower of stone" known as Cornettes, appointed by Edward the Third for exchange of money, for at that time the King claimed the sole right of exchanging English and foreign coins. The prerogative fell into abeyance, but Charles the First, in his wild attempts to raise a revenue without calling a Parliament, tried to revive it, and appointed an exchange at the other end of Cheapside, which gave its name to "Old Change." The old tower of which the memory is preserved in "Tower Royal," a lane out of Watling Street, was taken down, says our author, by one Buckle, a grocer, who was killed by the falling materials, and dying gave its name to Bucklersbury. And in his, Stow's, time it was occupied by grocers and apothecaries. Thus Shakespeare,

Like Bucklersbury in simple time,

when the potecaries were busy with all their herbal preparations, and Jonson sends the goodwife for

Two ounces of preserved milons from Bucklersbury.

Still the ancient market stretches on. And long after the market had shrunk away, the Poultry was lined by the poulterers' shops. And that dignified street called Prince's Street, occupied now by banks and insurance offices, once upon a time was Scalding Lane, occupied by those who scalded and trimmed the poultry for sale. Up "Freeman's Court" still exists the "Poulterer's Arms" as a memorial of the vanished dealers, who seem to have migrated en masse to Newgate Street, where there would be a fine show and pretty bustle about Christ mas time within our own memory. But alack! not a feather now flies in Newgate Street. You must go to the City markets now, and even there will not find such an aggregation of retail poulterers as once existed. In fact, the poulterers have followed the population.

Was it in this "Freeman's Court" that Dodson and Fogg had their offices? The text says Cornhill, but with such practitioners it would not have been prudent to indicate the locality too exactly.

Coasting now along the north shore of

Cheapside, we come to Honey Lane, with the site of a small market that long survived the ancient Chepe. Perhaps the bee-keepers had their stalls here—by the way, a ballad of the seventeenth century records how a swarm of bees settled on a post in Cheapside. But the name is often applied ironically to some evil-smelling locality, and such was once the character of the lane and market, although it is now quite otherwise. Milk Street is again redolent of the market, and brings the scent of the hay over the gaslights. Here, too, we are met with memories of the City of London School and of John Carpenter, the worthy town clerk, who founded it—all transferred bodily to the Embankment.

So Milk Street offers nothing worthy of note except some queer courts and passages, following which we are suddenly brought back to the Old Jewry, coming out opposite a cunning little paved court called—"Policeman, can you tell me the name of that court opposite?" The policeman on duty replies reflectively: "Well, I never heard it called by any name that I remember." And so, unlabelled and even unnoticed in the "Directory," it promises to slip out of human memory, that little opening which we remember well as Meeting House Court. There was an ancient meeting house, famous once, of the strict Presbyterian sect, in which Calamy held forth, and which was attended by many men of mark in the City. There is a morsel left of a kind of porch belonging to the old building—which tradition said had once been a Jews' synagogue. And tradition was not far out, for close by, anyhow, was the old sanctuary of the Jews, who followed William the Conqueror from Rouen, and settled partly here in the "Old Jewry" and partly in Jewin Street, where Milton once lived. As the Jews were expelled in the fourteenth century and never returned to their ancient dwellings, there is nothing left of them but the name.

By way of the Old Jewry you come into Gresham Street, which was once Cateaton Street, a name that no one has yet satisfactorily explained. Walking back to our former track we come upon Wood Street, that brings us out on Cheapside again at one of its most characteristic corners. For surely every one knows the great plane-tree that grows in Wood Street, whose branches wave above the passers-by in busy Cheapside. Still it flourishes, and in this year of grace ninety-five shows a crop of last year's nuts hanging from its bare wintry boughs. The empty space that surrounds the tree is the

site of the old Church of St. Peter—destroyed in the great fire and not rebuilt. It is a kind of sacred spot, with the old tree that has seen generations pass away, and that has set poets musing, as Wordsworth, to whose Susan,

Bright columns of vapour through Lothbury glide,
And a river flows on through the vale of Chepeside.

From this point we may take a view of Cheapside, as it appeared to our ancestors in the reign of Queen Anne, and as shown in a capital print of the period. It is our own Cheapside, a really noble street, not narrowed by tall buildings, or vulgarised by an excess of traffic, but tranquil and dignified, though not dull. The houses are plain and substantial, with balconies, and beneath are the quaint bow-windows of the period, belonging to the various shops—the signs of which still hang as thickly as the banners in a feudal hall. The footway is railed off from the street by substantial posts, and forms a kind of lounge, where ladies in hoops and sacques are searching for bargains; where beaux salute and exchange snuff-boxes, while a chair with its bearers tilted steadily along. In the road a huge tilted waggon with five horses tandem has brought up a load of produce—wool, probably, from Kent—while a bevy of country dames and lasses in broad hats look out in wonder at the movement of the town. There are a few fine coaches and a hackney or two in the street, and a pair of horsemen jog soberly along, and these, with a miller's cart charged with sacks of flour, and a dog sauntering along, make up the traffic of Cheapside. If it were not for Bow Church that stands there unchanged, we might doubt if this were really the roaring, rattling Cheapside of our own days.

After this comes Gutter Lane, that some say was once Guthrum Lane, from the Danish King of that name, who may once have settled here. But there is nothing ancient about the lane, unless we except the Assay Office at the back of Goldsmiths' Hall, where gold and silver plate has been hall-marked, certainly since 1327. And round the corner in Foster Lane we come upon the Hall itself, a handsome modern building still a good deal concerned with the interests of the craft, and conversant with all the mysteries of the Assay of Gold and Trial of the Pyx.

After Foster Lane there is only St. Martin's-le-Grand, almost swallowed up by huge new buildings devoted to the Post and Telegraph services, which will soon have the whole parish to themselves.

THE ROMANCE OF ELIZABETH.

A COMPLETE STORY.

WHEN John Pasmore had asked Elizabeth Coker to be his wife she had been the fairest blossom of girlhood in the parish of Trusham, only seventeen, upright and stately as a madonna lily, and sweet and blooming as the monthly roses that are such "long bidders," as they say in Devon. But nearly thirty years had passed since then, and the match had never come off. They had been in no hurry to marry, for John, a miller by trade, had his mother to support; whilst Elizabeth's mother having died shortly after she had become engaged, she had been left with a flock of young brothers and sisters to look after, and the hundred and one matters that go to make a farmhouse busy. Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of a small farmer, had taken up her burden cheerfully, and so it came to pass that her brothers went out into the world to do for themselves, and her sisters married, whilst she was left at home.

John Pasmore lived about a mile from Trusham village, in a quaint old house, situated in a lovely nook of the beautiful Teign valley. The Teign, clear and sparkling here, turned the mill wheel, as it had done during the lifetimes of generations of Pasmores; but now trade was bad, more elaborate machinery was coming into vogue, and the present Pasmore did not flourish. He was always an easy-going man, one who would never push his way in the world, but would be perfectly satisfied with what Fortune doled out to him.

Twice a week he climbed the steep hill that led to the village, and dropped in to supper at the farm, lingering to smoke a pipe with the farmer, whilst Elizabeth sat close by, and stitched at her needlework. As the years passed on the sweethearts grew less demonstrative in their affection. They rarely spoke of marriage. It was understood they must wait till John Pasmore's mother was dead, and Elizabeth, satisfied that John's heart was true to her, was content it should be so. If time had taken the first glad freshness from their mutual love, her heart still beat the quicker at the sound of his step. She used to accompany him as far as the churchyard on his way home after his visits to the farm, and there among the graves they would linger, till, with a hearty kiss and his cheery "Wull, gude night, my gurl," they would part at last.

This had been going on for nearly thirty years, when John's mother died. Now, thought every one, the long deferred wedding will take place. Every one was mistaken. John still continued his visits to the farm, but lately Elizabeth fancied him altered. His blue eyes met hers uneasily, and when she found he spoke no word of marriage, her woman's pride arose in arms, and the heart that had trusted and hoped so long and faithfully, began to doubt. She came to an understanding with him in a very few words, one Sunday, after evensong, when they lingered as usual in the churchyard.

"Jan," she said abruptly, "us hev kept company nigh 'pon thirty year."

"Ees, nigh 'pon thirty year," he repeated. "Time's hev bin mortal bad, Elizabeth, an' there was pover mawther."

It seemed as though he was trying to make excuses for those past years. Tears rose to her eyes, and for a minute dimmed her sight; then she laid her strong, brown hand on his arm, and looked bravely into his face.

"I knaw," she said quietly, "but maybe us was at vault tew wait, I dunno——"

There was a vision before her eyes of what might have been. Would it not have been better for him if they had married years ago? What might they not have done together? It was too late to think of that now.

"Us baint young now, Jan," she continued sadly, "an' so us'll bide as us be."

She had spoken with an effort, hoping that she might be mistaken in thinking his love was changed, but at his answer the faint hope perished.

"Do-e mean it, my gurl?" in tones half of regret, half of relief.

She knew then she was his "gurl" no longer; something had come between his heart and hers. She could only nod an assent, and turn her face away that he might not see her pain.

"Wull, w'at must be must," he remarked philosophically; "but arter thirty year, 'tis suddent!"

He doubtless meant the breaking of their engagement. Elizabeth sat down on an old flat tombstone, her eyes fixed on the ground, where primroses and white violets were growing over the resting-places of the dead. Idly she stooped and picked a handful of the sweet blossoms, and ever after their scent came to her with a feeling of acute pain and loss. There was a long silence, broken at last by the man.

"Ye'll lemme zee-e 'ome, Elizabeth?"

She looked up at him steadily, and he turned his eyes from the face he had once thought so fair with a sense of shame.

"Naw, thank-e, us'll zay gude night, Jan."

He looked regretful and sad, and yet, she saw, not sorry. She was cold and calm.

"Gude night, Elizabeth."

"Gude night, Jan."

And so they parted.

The little village was amazed, and at first incredulous when it heard the news of the broken engagement, but, unbelief was impossible when very shortly John Pasmore brought home a wife from Exeter. The first Sunday the newly married couple appeared at church, Elizabeth, looking at the young bride, understood everything. It was this girl, with her pretty doll's face and showy attire, who had stolen her love from her. "A fine sot-up shop gurl; 'air like a fuz bush, an' faked up like a ledly, which her a'nt," was the verdict of Trusham.

Poor John Pasmore! It was not long before the village gossips informed the young wife of his engagement to Elizabeth Coker, a fact he had foolishly kept from her knowledge. It was useless his assuring her he loved her better than all the world; she would not forgive him his silence; and then she had another grievance against him. She had imagined her middle-aged lover a prosperous man, and when she discovered shortly after her marriage the real state of his finances, her indignation knew no bounds. In her dismay and disgust she heaped reproaches and taunts upon him, till the unhappy man, who now saw his wife as she really was, vain, selfish, and heartless, answered her with angry oaths. He grew to look grey and old in those days. All the village knew that he and his wife were a wretched, ill-matched couple. John Pasmore had made "a jakes o't," every one agreed.

The following autumn was a singularly unhealthy time. Typhoid fever raged in Trusham, for beautifully situated as the little village was and swept by the fresh Dartmoor breeze, it was in a most unsanitary condition. Elizabeth Coker was a born nurse, and her services were continually in request. She was one of those whose very touch is healing; there was strength and gentleness in her capable hands, comfort and hope in the tones of her cheerful voice. Her face, with its fresh, bright colouring and clear brown eyes, was comely still, her step firm and elastic as in her youth. If she grieved over the loss of her

lover, her little world never knew how much, for she neglected none of her home duties, and her nature was too true to become soured.

As the autumn days grew cooler the fever abated in the village, but not before several new mounds had been added to the churchyard. There had been no fresh case for weeks, when it became known that John Pasmore was stricken down with the disease, and that his wife had deserted him. The monotony of her life at the mill, and the knowledge that her marriage was one huge blunder, had driven her to desperation, and she was gone—but not alone. There were whispers of stolen meetings in the woods with a gentleman who had lodged at a neighbouring farmhouse, ostensibly for the purpose of fishing in the Teign, and somehow it became known that he and John Pasmore's young wife had not met as strangers, and conclusions were drawn which proved all too true. The guilty couple had gone away together, whilst the wretched husband lay in the first stage of the fever, almost prostrate, as much from the knowledge of the shame and dishonour that had come to him as from disease. Then followed days when in his delirium the unhappy man raved for his wife, when, in his furious rage against her, he cursed the day he had first looked on her false face; but later on, weakened in body and mind, a softer mood came over him, and he wept bitterly.

Elizabeth heard the story of her old sweetheart's illness, and his wife's desertion, and her heart sorrowed for him. She longed to go and nurse and comfort him, if only for old sake's sake, yet she shrank sensitively from the step, knowing how all the village would talk. But when the news was brought to her that he was dying, she hesitated no longer.

It was a fine October afternoon when Elizabeth, with a firm, quick step, descended Trusham hill. The beautiful valley of the Teign lay stretched before her in all the rich glory of its autumn colouring, sheltered on either side by lofty hills.

Her eyes took in every detail. She could see the Christow waterfall, white and foaming in the distance, and there below her was the old mill, which she had once thought would be her home. The mill-wheel was silent now, and the firm steps faltered as they approached, the true heart beat unevenly. Was she too late? The house was very quiet, no sound broke the stillness but the ticking of the eight-day clock

in the kitchen. Elizabeth crept upstairs and into the sick-room, where she found an old woman watching by the invalid's side.

"Lor' a mussy!" exclaimed the nurse in astonishment, "be ye coom fur tew zee 'or die? Ur's a'most gone, pewer chap, ur be death-strook."

Elizabeth saw that he was indeed terribly ill. How he had aged in a few months, how grey he had grown, and how lined was his face! There was a wealth of pitying love in her heart, as she took one of his thin hands in hers, and stood looking down upon the well-known face. He was very weak, but though his eyes were closed, he moved restlessly and murmured broken sentences. She leaned over him and tried to catch some of the whispered words, and almost fancied she heard the sound of her own name.

"Jan," she whispered, "aw, Jan, my de-ur, my de-ur."

The weary eyes opened, and gazed at her with a look of mingled surprise and joy.

"My gurl," he said, "wull-e forgive me? Ur med a fule o' me, but 'twor'arl my vault."

"I know, an' there's natright fur-e tew take on 'bout, Jan."

"Wull-e kiss me? Us was sweet'arts fur thirty year, Elizabeth."

She complied, and he closed his eyes with exhaustion. The end was near. She placed her strong arm under the pillow, and lifted his head. She forgot the other watcher, she remembered only that she loved him now as when he had first come courting her; and he, opening his eyes once more, and looking up into the faithful face, forgot the long years that had passed since they plighted their troth, and fancied it was Elizabeth in her beautiful youth come back to him again.

"'Tis getting dimpeey, Elizabeth," he whispered, "an' 'tis most time I went 'ome long. Gude night, my gurl."

A FINAL BATCH OF TRADITIONS.

BATHIA, the daughter of Pharaoh, was not satisfied with merely having saved the child Moses;* she determined to make him her adopted son, and took him to live with her in the Palace. On one occasion, while he was still a toddling child, he narrowly

escaped being put to death. The Princess brought him to the Presence Chamber where Pharaoh sat in friendly, informal council with the malevolent Balaam, and took her seat by her Royal father, placing the child upon her knee. Attracted by the glitter of the crown, the infant Moses stretched out his arms for it, and the great King taking it from his own head placed it on the baby brows of the future lawgiver. The child toyed with it for a time, and then threw it on the ground and stamped upon it. The Royal circle was seized by consternation. It was the age of portents and auguries; of what might not such an act be ominous! From Balaam, malignant in mind as distorted in body,* came counsel prompt and grim. The act, he said, was, despite the child's tender age, fraught with significant intent. If Pharaoh would reign in peace he must slay the sacrilegious infant. Fortunately for Moses, Pharaoh—to employ the language of the law reports of our own day—"took time to consider his decision," and to assist him thereto convened a full council. At this council Jethro successfully defended the unconscious child who was fated to become his son-in-law.

The child grew up and found favour in the eyes of all; he was as a prince in the land, and Balaam, fearing his enmity, fled into Ethiopia, where the King, Kikanus, appointed him regent while he himself led an army to invade Assyria. Then came the incident of the killing the Egyptian, and Moses in his turn became a fugitive, and joined the army of Kikanus. Time went on; the Ethiopians conquered their enemy, and returned to their own land to find that the faithless Balaam had usurped the sovereignty. During the war that ensued Kikanus died, and Moses was elected King. The military skill which he displayed speedily subdued the rebels; Balaam returned to Egypt, and the Queen of Ethiopia became the wife of Moses.† After reigning with wisdom and majesty for some years, during which he again brought the Assyrians into subjection, Moses abdicated and went to Midian, where he married Jethro's daughter. While here he became possessed of the famous staff of Joseph—unless we prefer the tradition which avers that he discovered it when leaving the country. This staff was marvellous in every way. It was, according to some, a branch of the Tree of

* Moses, "drawn out," was the name given by Bathia; his father, mother, brother, sister, grandfather, and countrymen, each gave him other names with differing significations.

* Balaam is said to have been blind in one eye and lame in one leg.

† In name only, for Moses remembered the prohibition spoken to Jacob: "Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan."

Life which Adam had brought with him out of Eden; it came into the possession of Noah, thence through Shem, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to Joseph. When the last named died, the Pharaoh appropriated it, and from his successor Jethro obtained it by gift or subtlety. Jethro, they say, had planted it in the ground, and promised to give his daughter's hand to the man who could uproot it. Many tried and failed, till one day Moses passed, and, ignorant of the mystery, marked it as convenient for a walking staff and plucked it casually and with perfect ease. Jethro fulfilled his promise, and the staff became the famous miracle-working rod.*

And now the time came for Moses to return to Egypt and extort from the Pharaoh the freedom of the Israelites. A fearful task, humanly speaking, so mighty was the monarch he was about to defy. His palace had four hundred doors; each door was guarded by sixty thousand soldiers; the magicians who obeyed his behest numbered seventy thousand.† The power of these magicians was—as, indeed, the Scripture narrative implies—very considerable. They changed no less than forty ass loads of rods into serpents, but the rod of Moses assumed terrific proportions; “his jaws were fourscore cubits asunder, and when he laid his lower jaw on the earth, the upper reached to the top of the Palace.” It is scarcely surprising to hear that when Pharaoh and his Court saw this awful creature coming at them—after having swallowed the magicians' serpents—they were perfectly demoralised with fear and fled in tumultuous confusion, no fewer than twenty-five thousand losing their lives in the crush. In the case of two of the magicians, Sahour and Gadour, this miracle was the means of converting them. Bewildered at the power of this terrible rod-serpent, they repaired to the tomb of their father, himself a famous magician, and invoked his spirit to tell them whether the wonder wrought by Moses was due to magic or Divine assistance. They were told that if, when Moses slept, the rod lost its serpentine form, the transformation was due to magic; otherwise, it was the act of God. They discovered that when Moses slept, the rod-serpent, far from resuming its

original form, redoubled its activity and acted as a guard over the slumbering Prophet. They therefore confessed the power of the Hebrews' God, and were mutilated and crucified. Nor were they the only converts and martyrs. Asia, the wife of Pharaoh, classed by the Mussulmans amongst the four perfect women, also believed and confessed. She was stretched out naked where the burning sun was fiercest in its scorching power, her hands and feet were extended and fastened to stakes, on her breast was placed a heavy millstone. In her anguish she prayed, and angels came and sheltered her by their wings, while to her dying eyes her place in Paradise was disclosed.

With reference to the plague of flies and lice, the commentators add a fabulous detail not mentioned in Scripture. The Egyptians, they say, closed tightly all doors and windows, hoping thereby to keep out the insidious torment, but a huge sea monster called Silineth, whose hideous limbs were ten cubits long, was sent to open all the apertures and admit the invaders. Of the plague of hailstones they say that each was as big as a child's head, and burst into flame on touching the ground. While Pharaoh still refused to allow the Israelites to depart, some of them, notably the tribe of Ephraim, became impatient, and, regardless of warnings, made their escape, to the number of thirty thousand. They were, however, attacked by the Philistines, and all destroyed but ten. Years after, however, they were again to breathe and move upon the earth, for theirs were the “dry bones” over which Ezekiel prophesied, and which came together, and were clothed with flesh and inspired with breath, and stood upon their feet, “an exceeding great army.”* But they had not fulfilled the measure of their punishment; they moved amongst the living of that day but were not of them; their bodies so marvellously resuscitated never lost the appearance or the stench of corpses, and the terrible characteristic became hereditary in their descendants.

When the time came for the Israelites to leave Egypt, Moses was desirous of taking with him the bones of Joseph. But an unexpected difficulty arose; they could not be found. In this dilemma Moses con-

* As late as the fourteenth century fragments of Moses' rod were in the Cathedrals of Durham and Manchester—and doubtless elsewhere.

† Jannes and Jambres, the magicians who St. Paul tells us “withstood Moses,” are said to have been the sons of Balaam, and to have been the chief of the wise men.

* Another account says that these bones were those of some Israelites who fled from their homes for fear of pestilence or to avoid serving in a war commanded by God, and places their restoration much nearer their death, while their number varies between three thousand and seventy thousand.

sulted Serah, a descendant of the patriarch, and was informed that the body had been enclosed in a metal coffin and thrown into the Nile to sanctify the waters. The law-giver having had the approximate place pointed out to him, stood upon the bank, and addressing Joseph by name, told him that the time had come. Thereupon the massive coffin rose to the surface and floated to the shore.

The army which pursued the Israelites was indeed sufficient to make the latter "sore afraid." It consisted, we are told, of six hundred chosen chariots, two million foot soldiers, five million cavalry, and seventeen million black mounted troops.* Pharaoh commanded in person, riding on a magnificent charger of which he was very proud. When the waters of the sea overwhelmed the mighty host, so strong and sagacious was this horse that he would have carried his master to land, had not the angel Gabriel intervened to prevent it. And to this Miriam made special reference when she sang, "The horse and his rider hath He cast into the sea."

Space forbids more than a very scanty reference to the traditions respecting the wanderings. Sometime during the forty years Moses fought with and overcame the giant Og, whose appalling proportions have been before mentioned. In this account the stature of Moses is also hyperbolised. His height was ten ell† (nearly forty feet); when he attacked the giant he armed himself with an axe the same length; the mighty bound he made to strike at his huge assailant took him exactly the same height into the air, yet he was then only able to reach the monster's ankle.

The manna, miraculous as its supply was in reality, becomes marvellous in the extreme at the hands of the Rabbis. In Deuteronomy, second chapter, seventh verse, it is written: "Through this great wilderness these forty years . . . thou hast lacked nothing." They therefore aver that the manna became each person's favourite food—fish, flesh, or fowl, "oil to children, honey to old men, cakes to middle age," all flavours, indeed, except those of the regretted fruits of Egypt. Moreover, it fell in such enormous quantities that the kings of the nations around beheld it as it were a

mountain, and this, they say, is what is referred to in the text: "Thou hast prepared a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." Another marvellous characteristic of the manna was that it was marked with the letter Vau, which stands for the numeral six, as an intimation that it was only to be gathered during six days.

Korah, the antagonist of Moses, was, according to some, actuated by personal malice, and aroused the pitiless anger of the lawgiver by making a foul and groundless charge against him.* His wealth is said to have been enormous. We are gravely told that he required sixty camels to carry the keys only of his treasure houses; his enormous palace was overlaid with gold, and the massive doors were composed entirely of the same precious metal. The same quantitative exuberance is noticeable in the traditional accounts given of the reports of the spies. The strongest camel could scarcely carry one bunch of the grapes of the land of Canaan; one ear of corn gave enough flour to support a whole family for a week; in the shell of one of the pomegranates five armed men could gather; so high were the houses that the sky-haunting eagle itself could scarce soar above them; the puniest of the inhabitants was six hundred cubits high.

The actual maker of the golden calf was one Micah, and, like the Wandering Jew of later legend, he is still roaming over the face of the earth, warning any who meet him by the desolate cry: "Touch me not."

We must perforce leap over the years that intervened between the Exodus and the time of David and Solomon. It may readily be imagined that of these two monarchs, really famous as they were, their ingenious compatriots have a legion of stories.

David was divinely taught the art of making armour, which in some degree furthered his influence at the Court of Saul; stones obeyed him, and iron became as wax in his hands. His strength was prodigious; once he shot an arrow which transfixed eight hundred men; his

* A counterpart of this army is found in that of Sennacherib, which consisted of forty-five thousand princes with gold coronets, eighty thousand men in mail, sixty thousand swordsmen, and the rest cavalry. The whole army was two hundred and sixty myriads of thousands, less one!

† Others give the measurement as ten cubits.

* He suborned a witness who accused Moses of incontinence. The Prophet was terribly angry, and asked for and received the Divine permission to punish his traducer as he thought fit. Then the earth opened, and Korah slowly sank. Four times he pleaded for mercy, but Moses only reiterated: "Oh, earth, swallow them up." God then blamed him for his ruthlessness. "I," said He, "would have had mercy had he only asked Me once."

immunity in battle is ascribed to the fact that Adam had been permitted to give sixty years of his life to add to the years of the great King. But he was frequently in great danger. In one instance we come across the original of the story of Bruce and the spider. When David fled from Saul he hid in a cave, was pursued, and would have been discovered had not a spider woven its web across the entrance. On another occasion he owed his deliverance to a gnat. When he entered the camp to take Saul's sword, as he was crouching beside the sleeping King, Abner, who was in the same tent, turned in his sleep and threw his leg over David. The fate of the latter seemed sealed, when a gnat stung the obtruding limb and Abner removed it. Another tradition sounds like one of the tales of the genii. One day after he had come to the throne, and was hunting, the devil appeared to him in the likeness of a deer, which the King pursued into the land of the Philistines. Here he was recognised and captured by Ishbi, the brother of Goliath, who bound him neck and heels together and placed him beneath a wine-press. At this critical juncture a dove with silver wings appeared to the princes of Judah as they sat in council, and in some way gave them to understand that the King was in peril. Abishai mounted the King's horse, and in the twinkling of an eye was at Ishbi's house. The latter's mother promptly threw a spinning-wheel at him, which the Jewish warrior returned with fatal effect. Ishbi thereupon threw David high into the air and held his spear upright so as to transfix the King as he fell down; but Abishai pronounced the ineffable Name, and David remained poised above the ground. The danger thus averted, the King and his follower attacked the giant and killed him.

Solomon far eclipses his father in Rabbinical fame. In agreement with most Eastern nations, the Jews credit him with power over demons and genii. Well might he be called the wise King; but of the traditional examples of his wisdom we can only give a few. When about to build the Temple he sent to Pharaoh to lend him the services of some skilled artificers. The Egyptian King, with rather niggardly kingcraft, only sent those who were doomed to die within the year. Solomon sent them back, each man with a shroud, and with the taunting message to his brother monarch: "Hast thou no shrouds to bury thine own dead?" When the Queen of Sheba visited

him, amongst the "questions" * that she put to him was one which seriously puzzled the King. In each hand she held a wreath of flowers, one of which was natural and one artificial, but so exquisite was the workmanship of the latter that, at the distance the Queen stood from the throne, no difference could be detected. Could the wise Solomon, who knew all horticulture "from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that springeth out of the wall," tell his visitor which was the true and which the false? The King was nonplussed for a moment, but only for a moment. He commanded that the doors and windows should be thrown open, and the bees entering in answered for him the question of the Queen of the South.

To explain the statement that the Temple was built of stone made ready before it was brought there, and that there was no hammer nor tool of iron heard in the building, the Rabbis say that a mysterious worm was ordered by the King to eat through the stone and wood as was required. When Solomon brought the ark into the Temple, he was, it is said, tempted to give way to pride. "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and the King of Glory shall come in," he cried. "Who is the King of Glory?" rang out the choral versicle, and the King thought that surely it was none other than he himself. But looking up he saw the massive gates bending to crush him, and quickly he made the reverent response: "The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory."† Once when Solomon was at the zenith of his power, the enemy of mankind got considerably the better of him. As was common to all magicians, the King's power lay in the possession of a certain signet-ring. When he wished, for purposes of prayer or otherwise, to divest himself of his

* Many other interesting anecdotes are told of the interview between the monarchs, but they are rather too Oriental in their colouring for general reading.

† In Timb's *Notabilia* an interesting calculation is made as to the cost in present money of Solomon's Temple. The figures are bewildering. David accumulated in gold, five hundred and seven million five hundred and seventy-eight thousand one hundred and twenty-five pounds; in silver, three hundred and fifty-three million five hundred and ninety-one thousand six hundred and sixty-six. He subsequently added fifteen million two hundred and twenty-seven thousand two hundred and sixty-five pounds in gold, and two million four hundred and seventy-one thousand three hundred and fifty pounds silver. The Princes and people gave twenty-five million three hundred and seventy-eight thousand seven hundred and fifty pounds in gold, and three million five hundred and thirty-five thousand silver. The grand total was nine hundred and one million seven hundred and eighty-two thousand one hundred and fifty-six pounds!

weird potency, he was wont to entrust the ring to the care of Amina, one of the ladies of his court. One day, when he wished to make an act of contrition, he went some distance away into a secluded spot. The devil assumed the appearance of the monarch, presented himself to Amina, and in this manner obtained the ring, and by virtue of it occupied the throne and reigned forty days. The unfortunate Solomon meanwhile wandered about in the guise of a mendicant, and begged his bread from door to door. At last the devil flew away—or as some say, was discovered by the suspicions of the Queen and Royal ladies—and threw the ring into the sea, where it was swallowed by a fish, and eventually came into the possession of Solomon. It was a grim warning to the King, and ever afterwards, as we read in the Song of Solomon, three-score mighty men stood about his bed, every man with his sword upon his thigh "because of fear in the night."

One other legend brings us to the close of the wise King's life, and with it to the end of our traditions of the elders. Despite the assistance of genii and of the wonderful worm before mentioned, the stupendous work of the Temple was not finished before Solomon knew that his death was at hand. Fearful that his unearthly servants would cease their labours when they knew that their master was no longer over them, he prayed that his death might be concealed. And so it came to pass that for a whole year after his spirit had fled, the form of the aged monarch stood, leaning on his staff as if at prayer, in full sight of men and genii. At last the final touch was given, the Temple stood forth complete in its unrivalled splendour, and at the same moment the staff on which the King leaned fell beneath him, eaten through by a worm, and all knew that the wise man had gone to his "long home," and saw before their eyes his "dust return to the earth as it was."

IN THE BEAR LATITUDES.

"MR. BRUCE," said the captain, as we rose from our breakfast, "see that the cook burns some bones in the galley fire. With the bit of wind blowing landward, I think it should bring a few bears up."

"Yes, sir; I'll see to it," replied the mate, and came after me up the companion.

"Do you think," said I, walking forward with him, "that there is any chance of one coming round here as the captain thinks!"

"I do, certainly," he answered. "Why, only yesterday, doctor, when we were taking in some freshwater ice, I came across marks of the 'Laird'; he had been stepping about pretty freshly, too."

"Did you?" said I. "By George, I wish I had seen him!" And I may say here that my timidity with Polar bears had passed off. "Was he a big brute?" I asked.

"There were two of them," said the mate. "They had feet like saucepans, and that's big enough for me."

He added the last with a grin, and popped down the forehatch, where I followed him.

The galley was a tight fit. The cook, ever energetic in his own business, was engaged in running off his perquisite, the fat, into a large barrel. A surly row of seamon sat round the fire, conversing in highly audible and unpleasant asides for his benefit. For, if there is one fitting a tar hates supremely, it is the cook's fat-cask; and the one operation certain to raise his choler at all times is that of filling it up.

Bruce delivered his order, and we hastened as quickly as possible out of the atmosphere of frizzled fat.

On deck I was button-holed by a half-daft Shetlander, named Robbie, who requested a dose. This man was the most untiring medicine consumer I have ever met. And I will tell you how I played a trick on him, and got sold.

Very early in the voyage I determined to sour him, and Gregory's Mixture was to be the means. To me the taking of this is torture, and so I naturally imagined it would be to him, given under certain circumstances. So next time he proffered his request, I gave him a very large dose of this, and told him to mix it up in a bowl, and sup it in teaspoonfuls. I must say I chuckled somewhat to myself when I saw him up the companion.

After due time had elapsed, I descended into the half-deck, where his chest was. I hoped to find he had given it up in agony. Imagine my surprise, therefore, when I found Robbie sitting on his chest, all smiles, supping the mixture as if it were pineapple juice, and accompanying the same with a ship's biscuit.

Having got rid of Robbie, I drew to on the mate again, and we paced the deck together. He sprang a yarn on me about the capture of a full-sized Polar bear, and, as it isn't every day that one gets this sort

of thing, I set my pipe agoing, and told him to clap on.

"I was, at the time I speak of," he said, "second mate on board the barque 'Windward,' which was a stout, safe ship, but a bit of a tub for work in light weather."

This ship, the 'Windward,' is now carrying the Jackson-Harmsworth expedition, of North Pole fame.

"The captain had orders from headquarters that he was to catch a full-grown Polar bear, and bring it back with him. And to show there was no mistake, sir, we carried a big iron cage in the after-part of the half-deck."

He jerked his face up at me here to see if I was following. So I nodded.

"Well, sir," he continued, "when we got into the 'country,' the captain offered a pound of baccy to the lucky man as should be first to sight him. There was a sharp watch kept after that, as you'll believe. Even the cook would take a trip up to the crostrees every half-hour or so, when he wasn't running off his dirty fat. I was as keen as the rest of them, only I wasn't quite so showy with it, for it's a way with me to be short of baccy, whatever I do."

He put his pipe into his mouth and blew into it till it smoked like an engine.

"No wonder," said I, "when that's your style."

"Yes, doctor, I've a bad way with the pipe, and always had; but it's not that, it's 'catch-the-ten,'" he said, and continued: "When I was on watch I kept an eye like a hawk's on the horizon. But it so happened that one night I stole down to the steward's pantry to lay first hands on a jam-tart that I reckoned he was keeping for a first morning's bite. I reckoned right, sir; but it took me a fair time to find it, for he was a sly one was the steward, and had it under a couple of plates and an upturned pudding-dish."

"Cuter than our chap," said I. And he winked.

"Well, how should things go when I was down there exploring, but that one of the watch, hopping on to the bridge, spied him swimming between two blocks. He met me with it as I came on deck, and I could have knocked him overboard. Got a jam-tart, and lost a pound of baccy! It was the cleanest do I have ever got, sir; that's what it was."

"However, the thing was done, so I stepped down the stairs again, and opened the cabin door. The captain was playing chess with the doctor."

"There you are, doctor," cried he when I had told him, 'now's your chance.' And the doctor, who was a great strapping fellow, sprang up at the first word. 'Lower away a quarter boat!' said the captain to me then. 'And lose no time about it. The doctor knows what to do.'

"I went on deck, and in less than two minutes a boat was lowered and manned. How we were to catch him we couldn't see, and some of the men didn't like the job. And I must say I didn't either, when the doctor came over the side with a great coil of rope on his arm, having a running noose at one end. Then the men began to cheek up, as I thought they would. 'You'll be mighty clever if ye catch the Laird with that,' grumbled one. 'Ay, mighty clever,' said another. 'Walk up and put it round his neck, p'raps.'

"To these remarks the doctor made no answer, but intently studied the bear that was standing on a small block in full view. It was an enormous beast, one of the largest half-dozen I have ever seen, and I've seen hundreds. 'We'll need to shift him off of that, Bruce,' said he to me quietly. So we started to shout and splash. He was hard to scare, but at last, with a hoarse roar, he plunged into the sea."

"We soon saw what he was after, as he made a straight line for a near floe. If he reached that it was good-bye, and we knew it; so we got into a long, strong sweep. He swam hard, but we soon closed up on him. The doctor stood at the bow, and when six yards distant made a cast. It fell beyond him, and he turned in his tracks with a savage roar, and dashed at the boat with his mouth open and his forepaws up. 'Back oars! Back all!' I shouted, but he was too quick for us, and got a paw over the gunwale. In another crack we should have been all floundering in the sea, playing Tom Tiddler with a Polar bear, but the doctor fetched him one over the nose with a mallet, and he lost his grip."

"By Jove!" I said.

"Yes, sir, it was near enough; for when he opened his mouth I saw right down his throat. Well, sir, we backed oars pretty smart after that, and when the doctor had his noose once more, slipped between the Laird and the floe again. But he wouldn't be turned, and made at us for all he was able. We were too much for him, however, and, taking it easy, kept about six yards ahead, giving the doctor a chance for his throw. He made two weak shots, and then by a lucky drop had him round the neck fairly."

"Then the play began. The doctor forgot to pass the rope round the billet-heads, and so hung on to it without purchase. And had it not been that he was stronger than ordinary, he would have been overboard before you could say 'How's that?' But I got hold of the line with him, and gave it a turn in the nick of time, and, with a cheer, we bent to our oars again.

"But he was a great beast, and took some breaking in; though there's nothing so pleasant as breaking in a Polar bear, sir—unless," he added as an after-thought, "unless, maybe, it's a woman, doctor."

"Well, we won't argue it," said I, seeing an inclination towards this in his manner. "Go on with the bear."

"Well, sir, gradually the rope choked him, and he stopped roaring, though he still plunged and churned up the water like a small bottle-nose. And when we reached the ship, and had him hauled aboard by a tackle ready set, we discovered that he was almost gone. Which was just as well, sir! So we bundled him into the cage in the half-deck, where he soon recovered.

"He was a surly old ruffian, and, for a time, wouldn't let a man pass the bars without trying to claw him. And how he roared! Many a time I dreamt he was chewing me up, but it was just the first mate kicking a bit, sir, and the beast roaring in the half-deck. It was a delusion, sir; and a blessing that it was. For the cage wasn't too strong, and the men forward lived in constant fear that he would walk out some day and have a munch. But he never did. Though he once bit through the captain's boot, when he was playing foolish with the brute, and gave the old man a good scare."

"Served him right for tormenting the beast," said I.

"Yes, sir, it did; for he was always on for teasing him, was the captain."

"It was a nice thing to see him dealing with a bird, too, when we shot one. He would lay it on its back, place his claws in a line at each side of its breastbone, and with one pull, skin it as clean as you could wish, sir. Oh, he was a neat hand! and he liked a feed of gulls; but his regular diet was peasoup."

"Now, come," said I, "no peasoup this way, please."

He lifted his eyebrows and looked at me square.

"It's a fact, sir," he said energetically. "You needn't believe me unless you like, but I say it's true, doctor; and there's

more than one in this ship who will go with me."

"Very well, then," said I; "it's all right. But peasoup and a bear looks a bit queer at first sight, somehow."

"Maybe it does, sir; but it's gospel truth. He had a big tin dish made for him by the second engineer, which served him as a soup-plate, and he would empty it three and four times a day. And he got to have a knowledge of good and bad peasoup, did that bear, before we reached——"

He ended up abruptly to answer the captain, who called him to the bridge.

"I say, doctor," called the captain to me presently, as I leaned against the winch, "you might take a run up to the crow's nest and see if you can make out anything."

"Right," said I, and jumped on to the main ratlines, by no means ill-pleased to get the chance.

It wasn't long, either, before I did make something out. I examined the object eagerly. A seal. No, a bear! By Jove! Three bears! Yes; I saw them move apart, and there was no mistake.

"Below, there!" I sang out. And the captain and mate turned their eyes up.

"Three bears astern of us," I shouted again.

There was a short conversation on the bridge. Then the captain shouted up interrogatively:

"Cubs?"

"Yes, two cubs," I returned, "quarter grown, and one old one."

The captain said something to the mate. Then the mate bounced off the bridge and ran forward.

"He's going," I said to myself. So I rammed the glass into its cover and descended with all speed.

The mate passed me as he came aft again to let go the boat's falls.

"Get ready, if you're coming," he said. And splash! as the boat dropped into the water.

I stepped down for my rifle, and we got off in record time, even for a whaler.

The men pulled quietly, making as little motion in the water as possible, though that is not so apt to disturb a bear as seals or narwhals.

The ice-block the bears were on was a small one. And between it and the nearest ice, which was a large scance, was a channel of open water some seventy yards wide.

The boat-steerer was looking around him intently. Suddenly he spoke.

"Bill," he said to the mate, "that

scance touches the floe at the far end. It'll be close work if she won't stand to be cut off, and makes a run for it. And once on there, good-bye."

"Well, we must just hope," replied Bruce. "I've seen them stand up to thirty yards."

"Ay, but this lady won't," said the old salt aft. And at the same moment, when we were yet two hundred yards distant, the bear plunged into the sea.

But the cubs would not follow her; so she reared up and drew herself on to the ice as before.

We had made about forty yards in all, when she again sprang off, with a defiant glance at us, followed by a deep roar. She swam close to the ice edge, growling softly, and this time coaxed the cubs on to her back. One stood on her foreshoulder, and the other on her hindquarters.

It was a sight to see her ploughing along thus. And one that, when I glanced at the cocked rifle in my hand, made me revolt against myself. What a murderer I would be, indeed, if I aimed a bullet at that noble creature!

But Bruce had no such feelings. It was not a case for sentiment, but a matter of furs only. And I knew that the only hope for the bear lay in her reaching the scance first.

The chase had now taken a new interest for me. I laid everything on the bear. Ah, if she would only win!

The mate looked round. And then instantly:

"Pull, lads!" said he; "or, as I'm alive, she'll make it first."

The men answered nothing, but the whale boat jumped forward, and I knew they were pulling for all they were able.

We were gaining rapidly, but if Mother Ursus kept it up she was sure to win. Now and again she turned her head, and growled fiercely as she saw we were nearing. And sometimes the cubs followed her in an anxious gaze.

"Hurrah, she will win!" I said to myself. "She will win!"

"Blow it!" exclaimed the mate, with deep chagrin, as he turned round a second time; "she's beat us, lads."

The crew dropped their oars and looked.

"Knew she would," remarked the boat-steerer, as we watched them mount on to the ice, and gallop off towards the level white expanse of the floe. "'Twas just likely. But I ain't grumbling, to be sure. Not I."

"No, you ain't been pulling," retorted a man gruffly.

"Well, no, that's so," replied the steerer composedly. "That's the beauty, ye see, mate, of being talented. I'm glad she got off. She deserved to, and that's more than can be said of some folk as ain't hung yet."

With this discharge of eloquence he turned the boat round, and the crew, very sullen indeed, rowed back to the ship.

RICHENDA.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "The Thirteen's Brydlin," "Catherine Maidment's Burden," "Benefit of Clergy," "The Vicar's Aunt," etc. etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. FITZGERALD'S words to Sir Roderick Graeme about Richenda Leicester might have been contemptuous in tone, but they were very natural. The sudden and amazing change in the circumstances of her former nurse had been a shock not only to Mrs. Fitzgerald, but to many people both within and without Richenda's own small circle of friends and acquaintances. It is by no means an everyday occurrence for a girl who has been quietly earning her bread as a nurse to change into a popular, much-sought-after darling of society. And a great deal of the halo of romance and excitement which society had thrown around Richenda Leicester was due to the fact that she and her story had provided it with an inestimable boon—something fresh to talk of, some one interesting to discover. It had proceeded to do both with amazing rapidity and avidity.

But if the shock had been great to a startled society "set," it had been far greater to Richenda Leicester herself. For the whole of the August day on which the letter containing the news of her fortune reached her, and indeed for many and many a day after it, Richenda failed entirely to realise the change that had come to her life. She simply knew vaguely that everything in the world was suddenly altered, and that the cause of this change was indescribably exciting to her imagination; she knew that where all had been difficulty and doubt, all was pleasure and excitement. With this sensation in her mind she went to sleep every night, and waked every morning. Beyond it, for the time, she could not go. Directly she tried to grasp the details that gave rise to this sensation, her head seemed to swim, and she felt completely at a loss. She used to

say over and over again to herself the words of the old lawyer who was henceforth her adviser.

"An unusual fortune for such young hands; and a great responsibility, my dear young lady," he had said to her on the morning of his first interview with her.

But, try as she would to realise them, the words conveyed, at first, nothing to Richenda. The old man's manner impressed her with the fact that this excitement had its serious and definite side, but the impression lasted only for a time. It faded away again in the bewildering sense which haunted her of being a different person; of leaving the old Richenda behind in some other world. Not even the very definite and explicitly expressed written and spoken congratulations of her friends brought the facts of her position out of the haze of excitement which enveloped them in her mind. That every one was pleased with her, and made so much of her, was only part of the change in her life, she thought.

It was not until definite action on her part was necessary, that she seemed to emerge from her confusing mist of delight into an atmosphere of facts.

Old Mr. Griggs, the lawyer, had had to take the preliminary steps towards forming an establishment for her, almost alone. He had extracted from her the fact that her wish was to live in London. He had put himself into communication with suitable house agents, and having caused a selection of possible houses to be made for him, he next had to exert much pressure to get the bewildered Richenda to see them and make her own choice; and he had been compelled, on his own responsibility, to take steps towards engaging a chaperon for the girl who could scarcely grasp the fact that she was about to possess a house, much less that she must have some one to live with her in it. It was only when she actually paid down, by her own cheque, half a year's rent of the house she had taken, that realisation seemed to dawn on her. This seemed to clear away the incomprehending excitement as nothing else had done. With the first use of her power, Richenda suddenly saw the force and extent of that power; and having seen it, she lost no time at all in using it.

She threw herself with an eagerness in proportion to her excitement into the minutest details of what lay before her. Mr. Griggs, to his amazement and relief, found his burdens lightened. Richenda

herself undertook to furnish her new house. She traversed London in cabs in an incessant bustle of excitement while she carried out this undertaking. She would have no help, and very little advice. Now she had found out what she could do, apparently, she meant to enjoy the doing of it to the full. The house, a comfortable, new building in the best part of Kensington, did full justice to her efforts when they were completed; and Richenda, without pausing to spend even a day in "shopping" some of the smart clothes for herself which Bessie Langton pressed her incessantly to procure, threw herself with even more energy into the necessary arrangements for removing her brothers from their different schools and transferring them, Jack to the hospital of his choice, and the twins to whatever school in London Mr. Griggs might advise.

And Richenda tasted the best part of her happiness, reached the zenith, as it seemed to her, of her power, on the day when the three boys, excited, demonstrative, and wildly happy, came to spend the weeks that remained of their summer holidays with "Richie" in their own future home.

She had in very truth all that her money could give, all that this world could give her, she said and felt within herself, as the four sat together in her pretty drawing-room on that first night. "The boys" could be with her always now, and she could give them all they wanted.

And that night, as her pretty head rested on its soft pillows, she dreamt dreams of unclouded happiness for them, and for herself through them. For the rest of their holidays Richenda lived with them and for them, finding each day more delightful than the last. And when they were gone back to school and work, she still had the daily pleasure of welcoming them at all their incomings and speeding all their outgoings.

Of society, and the position her wealth could give her in the outer world, Richenda never thought until one autumn day some weeks later, when the forerunner of a sort of storm of callers swept down upon her in much grandeur. The said forerunner was what the slang of to-day calls a very "smart" woman indeed; and she was rapidly followed first by a train of her own followers, and then theirs. At first Richenda was a little awed and overwhelmed by the position these new acquaintances were ready to accord her; then, by rapid degrees, she grew to enjoy it, and, lastly, to expect

it. So quickly did she adapt herself to their tone that, in a very few weeks from her first introduction to this new society, she would have felt angry and ill-used if it had not paid her deferential court. The calls were followed, as London filled and the winter season drew on, by countless invitations. Invitations to dinners, dances, "at homes"; cards for everything and anything that was going on in the "smart" section of society into which she had so suddenly entered, filled Richenda's mantelpiece. Richenda eagerly and excitedly accepted every single invitation which she could get into her day, and for that matter, her night too. She made excuses, deprecating and loving at first, a little perfunctory later, to her brothers, for not spending so much time with them as she had done at first; and she dragged her well-paid but somewhat wearied chaperon hither and thither, up and down the length and breadth of "smart" London. And by the time it became necessary for Richenda to return what she had received by entertaining on her own account, she had slipped into a sort of whirl of calls, parties, acquaintances, and talk; a whirl in which she seemed to take her place as easily as if it had surrounded her all her life long.

Sometimes, in the early days of her new life, there were moments when all the coming and going, the enjoyment and excitement, seemed to Richenda almost dreamlike in its unreality. And these moments were those in which she realised that one of the most prominent figures belonging to her old life was equally prominent in the new—the figure of Fergus Kennaway.

He had entered her new life without any warning or intimation of his intention. On one of her very first "at home" days, as Richenda was in her drawing-room, entertaining, a little shyly, a roomful of men and women still more or less strange to her, her servant had suddenly announced:

"Mr. Fergus Kennaway."

The sound of the loudly and distinctly uttered syllables struck on Richenda's ears with a great shock; a shock that took away her breath, and held her, half-stupefied and giddy with amazement, silent before the woman to whom she had been talking gaily of nothing at all, the instant before. A great wave of angry resentment swept over her, taking entire possession of her. Complete in all its details, the remembrance of that moonlight summer night in Bryan-

ston Street rose before her, blotting out from her for the instant the room before her, and dulling her ears to the chatter around her. She heard only a voice whose tones filled her with a burning sense of insult. How did he dare to enter her house? she said to herself furiously. How could he presume to come into her presence again? How could she best show him what she thought of his conduct then, and his conduct now? But while all these thoughts were rushing through her angry mind, and while the woman to whom she had been talking had rather wonderingly seen her colour change, first to a burning red, then to a dead white, her time for decision ended, and the crisis came before she had collected herself at all to meet it. Fergus Kennaway was standing before her, and she found herself holding out her hand to him, and listening to well assured, neatly turned congratulations and felicitations, which seemed to come to her through a bewildering thick mist of confused, angry helplessness. A moment later, and the helplessly angry feelings had given place to quite a different emotion. Fergus Kennaway's manner was so perfectly assured, so entirely secure of a welcome, that Richenda felt utterly at a loss. She must, she told herself, be making some fearful mistake. She must be dreaming, or she must have imagined all that had just passed through her mind. For this man who spoke to her now, this ready, easy, pleasantly confident new-comer could have no cause to stand arraigned at the bar of her judgement; it was impossible he had or could ever have had anything to be ashamed of in his former contact with her.

Feeling half dazed, but wholly subdued, she had offered him tea mechanically, and had listened equally mechanically to the light and witty social comments with which he proceeded to amuse the little group of people nearest to himself and her.

Richenda's feelings of that afternoon were fairly typical of the way in which she regarded Fergus Kennaway during the weeks which followed. It was some time before he appeared again; but when he did reappear, he presented himself to Richenda as one who was on the footing of an intimate and trusted friend. So forcibly was this footing demonstrated in all he said and did, that before he left it had, unconsciously to herself, greatly affected Richenda's consideration of him. She received, she could not have told how, an impression that he must be what he asserted he was. And as the days and

weeks went by, this impression became a reality. Richenda never knew how or when this happened; she could not have said when it was that she began first to give Fergus Kennaway the position which he steadily but tacitly claimed. The change in her feelings and his standing happened gradually and by imperceptible degrees. Richenda only knew that Fergus Kennaway was what she called "very nice" to her; invariably and almost chivalrously courteous; adroitly and incessantly attentive.

If she wanted anything troublesome done or arranged for her, Kennaway was sure to be able to do it; if she was a little bored on a wet or foggy day, he was sure to appear with amusing talk and fresh interests. He procured her invitations to choice little Bohemian parties, and interesting "shows" of various kinds. He sent her flowers and presents; indeed, after a little while, he scarcely allowed a day to pass for Richenda without some pleasant reminder of his existence. And he followed up all his pains and all his attention with a delicate, imperceptible flattery. Richenda soon learned to find it very pleasant to have at her command a man in whose eyes all she said, did, or looked was, according to him, perfection; a man who could, therefore, always put her into the most delightful humour with herself.

All this developed suddenly, but almost imperceptibly, into a pointed, personal devotion, and the time came when Fergus Kennaway presented himself undisguisedly in the character of a would-be lover. There had been days, and days in the very recent past, when the thought of Fergus Kennaway as her lover would have given to Richenda a violent shock of aversion. It was one thing, she would have said, then, to let him come and go about her house as a friend, and quite another to tolerate him in a nearer relation; but by the time his intentions became patent to the world, Richenda had learned to depend upon Fergus Kennaway as she had never depended on any man before, and had, it seemed, wholly forgotten her aversion. As a matter of fact, it had been swept away by her excitement, by the force of the circumstances which threw the two so constantly together, and by the radical if undefined change which Richenda had undergone, mentally and morally, in the comparatively short time that had elapsed since she became a rich woman. The old Richenda would have had nothing to say to Fergus Kenna-

way in the character of lover, or in any other. The fact that the new Richenda could so receive him was a curious proof of how far her old self had sunk out of sight and out of mind. For receive him she most certainly did, as he wished to be received.

On the night of her party she was in a fair way to give him the sentiment that his code of emotions, and hers also, now, called love; and on the following afternoon, as she sat in her drawing-room, she was wearing in her dress some of the lilies of the valley from the bouquet Fergus Kennaway had given her the night before. She was not alone. On her lap, sniffing delightedly every now and then at the fragrant white flowers just above her, Dolly Fitzgerald was comfortably established. On the soft hearthrug at her feet, on two small stools, sat Brian and Veronica. The three children had been enjoying what was a great delight to them; they had been having luncheon with Richenda. And now they were having what they still more appreciated—an hour all to themselves with her. Mrs. Morris, Richenda's chaperon, was out, Jack Leicester was at his daily work in the hospital schools, and the twins, whose holidays were not quite over, had been out all day, skating. Richenda expected no callers. It was a dull and rather snowy afternoon, and the prospect of going home in a cab, with all its attendant possibilities, had just been exhaustively dwelt upon by Brian in a joyfully shrill little voice.

"I don't mean it as if I wanted the cab to come now," he explained carefully. "I don't want the cab to come for us, never. I don't never want to go away from you, darling."

This was the only way in which Brian would address Richenda now. Her change of position and her present life had been a startling revolution indeed of every precedent for the Fitzgerald children.

"I thought nurse was a nurse—a true nurse," explained Veronica, in a voice pathetic with incomprehension. "If she's changed into a rich lady, she was only a sham nurse, like the cat that was a princess in the pantomime."

"She's not our nurse no more," lamented the other two in chorus.

But when they actually saw Richenda again the lamentation and wonder all changed into pleasure. She had sent a note, asking if she might take them out for an afternoon, fetching them in her carriage; and when she sprang lightly out of it at

the door of the Bryanston Street house, the three eagerly expectant small figures threw themselves joyfully and confidently into the arms which were thrown open to receive them.

"You're all real, and just the same," said Brian, as they drove home, contentedly gazing at her over the top of a large parcel from the Lowther Arcade. "If I mustn't call you nurse no more, I shall call you darling."

"Because you was it, and you are," explained Veronica from her post of honour beside Richenda.

And "darling" Richenda had remained with all three.

She laughed gently now at Brian's statement; a pleased little laugh.

"I'm so glad you like being here," she said. "I like to have you quite as much!"

Brian had wheeled his stool closer to Richenda's feet, and had turned himself round so as to face her. His own small face was supported on both his small hands, and he was gazing steadily up into Richenda's. She was just reaching forward to stroke his curly hair, and Veronica was looking on with wide, envying eyes, when the door was suddenly opened. Sir Roderick Graeme, for the second time within the past twenty-four hours, was ushered into Richenda Leicester's presence. He stood for one instant looking at the group, before Richenda looked up, and in that instant his face had turned from white to red, and then back again to a slight pallor.

"How do you do?" he said. "I'm afraid I am——"

But he was cut short. Richenda put Dolly quickly on the ground, and with one hand clinging to the child's tiny hand, rose and held out her other to Sir Roderick. She did so in silence, so far as she herself was concerned, but the silence was more than filled. At the first sound of Sir Roderick's voice, Veronica and Brian had turned with a start, while a sort of shriek of joy broke from the former.

"Godfather!" she cried, hanging on to his arm, while Brian contentedly aspired no higher than his knees. "Ob, godfather, mother told us you'd come back; and we are so glad!"

"I thought p'raps bears was eating you in Scotland," added Brian, as a sort of satisfied echo to Veronica.

Sir Roderick disengaged himself gently and reassuringly from these demonstrations of affection, and sat down in a chair facing the

fire, but slightly turned towards Richenda. She had not, as yet, spoken to him at all. He was so conscious of this fact that he thought she must be equally conscious of it, and must have some reason for her silence. But when, the instant after, she did speak, her voice was perfectly quiet and ordinary.

"It is very good of you to come out on such a wretched afternoon," she said.

She had reseated herself, and now she stooped to pick up Dolly and restore her to her place on her lap. Brian and Veronica, meanwhile, tried to arrange their stools impartially between Richenda and Sir Roderick. Brian's had a slight leaning towards the latter's chair. He was eagerly awaiting an opening to question him on his intercourse with the fauna of Scotland.

"Not at all," Sir Roderick said, with stiff conventional politeness. "As to the afternoon, it has brought me the good fortune of finding you at home."

Richenda made a pretty gesture of acceptance of his polite little speech, and then her own face flushed a little. It was a very little flush, but Sir Roderick was looking at her, and it seemed apparently to make him suddenly aware of the fact that Richenda was rather paler now than she had been in past days.

"I hope," he said, stiffly but solicitously, "that you were not too tired after last night?"

Richenda laughed. It was a light little laugh, but it had a rather harsh sound in it.

"Tired!" she said. "No, indeed, thanks, I'm never tired with having people. I like it, awfully."

"I'm glad of that," he said awkwardly.

And then he paused. Richenda made no effort to carry on the conversation. She played with Dolly's hair, and gazed over the child's curly head into space. Her thoughts were concentrated on her guest, but not on her guest's present claims upon her.

The sound of Sir Roderick's voice was recalling to her more than one afternoon in the Bryanston Street nursery; afternoons when she herself, Sir Roderick, and these same three children had made much the same group as they were making at this identical moment. And it was the similarity of the circumstances which was pointing the difference of the reality for Richenda. Her pretty lips curled slightly and her eyes flashed a little as she thought to herself bitterly, that in those days Sir

Roderick had taken comparatively no notice of her, unless — and her mouth quivered with anger at the thought — unless he forgot himself. Now, in these days, she was precisely the same woman, she said bitterly to herself, and the change in their relationship had been brought about simply by her possession of money. And now Sir Roderick was eager enough to notice her, eager enough to make friends. He could come now, with even excessive politeness, to call upon her on the very day after her party.

Unseen by Miss Leicester, Sir Roderick had been gazing covertly at her face. He saw her lips curl and her eyes flash, and his own face was growing just a shade paler than before when Brian's cheery small voice broke suddenly into the silence.

"Have you shot many wild beasts?" he asked very respectfully of Sir Roderick.

Brian had been longing for some moments to make this enquiry, but something in Sir Roderick's face had deterred him, in spite of the favouring silence, from accosting him, and his courage had only just got the better of his dread.

Both Sir Roderick and Richenda started, and the former turned towards Brian with a look of absolute relief.

"Wild beasts?" he said reflectively. "Well, no, Brian. I can't say that I have."

"I told him wild beasts never grew in Scotland, and he wouldn't b'lieve! They don't, do they?"

Veronica's voice was prepared to be very triumphant.

"Well, but, darling," said Brian, turning to Richenda, "I asked you where there was wild beasts to shoot, and you said 'other countries.' Scotland is one other country, isn't it?"

Brian's voice was so pleading and yet so determined that Sir Roderick and Miss Leicester both laughed outright. As it had done on that long ago afternoon, Richenda's laugh seemed to establish for a moment pleasant and easy relations between them.

"Convincing logic!" she said, smiling at Sir Roderick with a smile that was very like the old Richenda. "Be gentle in your disillusionment," she added laughingly.

He smiled at her in return, and his grave face was wonderfully transformed by his smile. Richenda, who had thought, casually, that he looked both older and much changed since she had seen him,

suddenly now was reminded by his look of that day in the Park when his sympathy had consoled her for Mrs. Fitzgerald's hard words.

Sir Roderick leaned forward, picked Brian up from his stool, and placed him on his knee.

"It sounds awfully stupid of me," he said apologetically, "but I never thought of looking for any wild beasts, Brian, and I certainly never found any."

"Don't none never roar?"

"I never heard them, and I'm afraid I should have, if they'd been there. For I've been in Scotland very often. I lived there when I was a small boy."

Brian evidently found these statements most disheartening. He slipped, silently, round down from Sir Roderick's knee, and stood gazing with a regretful face at the fire. Sir Roderick smiled.

"Cheer up, Brian," he said encouragingly. "There are heaps of wild beasts to be found in far-away places, and as soon as you're a man, you can go and see for them."

This line of consolation was too vague, it seemed; for Brian paid no heed to it. Sir Roderick moved a little restlessly on his chair, and pulled his moustache.

"I made the acquaintance of one of your brothers last night," he said to Richenda. "I was very pleased to know him."

Richenda turned to him quickly. Her face, which had grown quite cold and hard after she had smiled, changed again to something that was almost cordiality.

"Yes!" she said interestedly. "It was Jack, my eldest brother. The twins weren't about. I don't allow them to keep dissipated hours as yet!"

"They live with you?"

"They live with me; yes," she answered.

"I remember that you told me once that you were very anxious to be able to live all together. It must be awfully nice for you to arrange it."

Sir Roderick spoke very hesitatingly; and it seemed more as if he were irresistibly impelled to recall the memory, than as if he wished to allude to the confidence she had made to him on that past afternoon.

Miss Leicester hesitated. Her colour flushed and ebbed again before she answered. For one moment it gave her an odd little thrill to find that he remembered her words to him that day; then she was bitterly angry with him for daring to recall to her the day on which he had hurt her

feelings so deeply; the day on which he had so obviously remembered that she was a servant. The last feeling dominated her finally, and her voice rang rather sharply, while her lips curled more than ever as she said curtly:

"Yes, I did tell you so, I suppose. But I wonder why I troubled you with my affairs."

Sir Roderick listened to her cutting words quietly enough. An odd contraction passed across the muscles of his face, but he did not speak. He stretched out a hand to Brian, and drew him silently nearer, as if he felt that the presence of the childish incomprehending nature was a kind of relief. Richenda was woman enough to see that her words had hurt him; and woman enough, also, to be very sorry for them, just an instant too late.

"It is very nice indeed for me," she said, more kindly. "I like having the boys more than I can say."

But her altered tone and words were, apparently, lost upon Sir Roderick. He had risen, still holding Brian's small hand, almost directly after she had spoken. And as she spoke he stood before her, saying something incoherent about an engagement.

Richenda put Dolly off her lap and rose too.

"Good-bye," she said, rather coldly, "if you won't wait and have some tea. I am at home on Thursdays," she added stiffly, and apparently as a sort of after-thought.

Sir Roderick took the hand she held out

to him, and loosed it again, without any further words than the most conventional "good-bye." Then he took a hurried leave of the children, and was gone.

Miss Leicester, with Dolly holding to her skirts, still stood gazing into the fire in silence, until the sound of the closing front door made itself heard in the drawing-room. Then, all at once, she sat down rather hastily, and with the same movement pushed her chair farther back, out of the circle of firelight which was beginning to usurp the place of the fading winter daylight.

She did not take Dolly back into her lap. She did not even seem to notice her, and the little girl, after waiting in injured silence, scrambled back by herself, unheeded.

Veronica and Brian were taking a wicked pleasure in the forbidden pursuit of poking the fire; but finding themselves unhindered and unchecked in it, it ceased to delight them, and they turned round to Miss Leicester, to discover the reason of this strange license.

Richenda was leaning back in the chair; her face was rather set, and a trifle pale. Her eyes seemed to be steadily following the outlines of the firelight on the opposite wall.

She roused herself with a great start, as two pair of small elbows dented themselves into her knees, and two small voices said in chorus:

"Was you tired of seeing godfather, darling, or was you only sleepy?"

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PRISONERS OF SILENCE.

By MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

*Author of "A Valiant Ignorance," "A Mere Cypher,"
"Cross Currents," etc., etc.*

CHAPTER XLI.

THREE days had passed.

The dreary tête-à-tête dinner was over; Mrs. Vallotson had left the dining-room, and North was alone. He was sitting in his place at the table, his head propped on his clenched hand. His eyes, full of a sombre sense of necessity, stared down at the cloth; his mouth was grimly set, but his whole face was pervaded by an indescribable pale reluctance. He roused himself abruptly at last; he went with firm, rapid steps out of the room and up to the drawing-room.

Mrs. Vallotson was there, seated in her usual chair, but she was quite unoccupied. As the door opened she started slightly, but with a nervousness which was not like her, turning her face towards it as if involuntarily.

There was a rather singular, stupefied look upon it; a look which North had noticed for the first time on his return home in the evening three days before. A dull bewilderment seemed to look for an instant out of the gloomy eyes, only to evade his gaze as he tried to fix it. The bitterness of the features was in no wise softened, but something of numbness seemed to be creeping over them. He had tried in vain during the past three days to define or account for the change in her; a change which he seemed to detect even in the odd, far away voice in which the few words she had uttered in the course of those days had been spoken. And he had put his impres-

sions away from him, telling himself sadly that they were born of his own painful knowledge of what was as yet unknown to her.

He sat down beside her now, as he had done on the evening when he had suggested her first interview with Dr. Grant, and paused. He hardly knew what impulse dictated his first words.

"Are you in pain this evening?" he said gently.

She moved uneasily and shook her head, turning her face away from him.

"No," she said.

The word was not true. She was always in more or less pain, and he knew it well. A sharp sigh parted his lips, and then his face grew very strong.

"Grant tells me," he said, "that you ask him no questions."

He spoke slowly and deliberately, and paused, tacitly exacting an answer from her. She was passing the open palm of her hand up and down on the arm of her chair with a regular, monotonous motion.

"Have you seen him?" she said at last.

There was a muffled sound about her voice.

"I saw him yesterday," he returned. "He tells me also," he went on, "that he thinks you are not without suspicion as to the gravity of your symptoms."

Then there was another dead silence. There was something braced and set about the gaunt figure, and the movement of her hand alone went on unceasingly. At last it stopped. Her fingers clenched themselves slowly round the arm of the chair, and she turned her face towards him.

"What is it?"

For an instant he scanned her face keenly, and then he answered her. He spoke one sentence only in a low, steady voice.

A short shudder ran through her frame; her features seemed to contract, and then she was quite still, gazing straight before her. It seemed to North, watching that resolute acceptance of an awful sentence, a long time before she spoke; in reality it was, as he knew, not more than a moment or two.

"That means—death!"

The words, low and brooding, were a statement rather than a question, and North's voice as he began to answer her was a little hoarse. He cleared it determinedly as he proceeded.

"It is not wholly curable," he said. "I cannot tell you that it is. Grant is of opinion, however, that something may be done by which its progress may be arrested."

"Is it very far advanced?"

She asked the question quickly, but her voice was quite firm.

"Yes," said North; his innate reserve and his professional habit of self-control had never served him in better stead. "It is necessary that you should know that the utmost to be hoped from the measures Grant proposes to take would be the prolonging of your life for a few years. But on the other hand, if no such steps are taken——"

"How long shall I live?"

The words, heavy and slow, broke in upon his sentence, and North was forced to pause a moment before he answered them.

"In Grant's opinion you may live two months," he said, "possibly not so long."

He paused, watching her with heart-sick anxiety. He saw a sharp spasm of emotion pass across her face, and he said quickly and with recovered steadiness of tone:

"Therefore it is obviously advisable that the operation should be performed, and that without delay. It would not be right to conceal from you that there is a certain amount of risk connected with it, but, in face of the alternative, Grant advises strongly that that risk should be met."

"I will not have it done."

There was such a dead level of composure in her tone that for an instant North doubted whether he could have heard her aright. He looked at her uncertainly. Her eyes were fixed on space, sombre and musing.

"You don't quite understand, I am afraid," he said very gently. "It is necessary. It offers you your only chance of life."

"I will not have it done!"

Not a tone, not an inflection was altered, and as the reiteration fell upon North's ears he moved uneasily. He leaned suddenly

forward in his chair and began to speak with greater urgency.

"Why not?" he said. "Do you not rely on Grant's opinion? You can hardly have a better man, but if you would prefer another opinion you can see any one you like. Is it the thought of the risk from which you shrink? It is a risk, I allow. But if it succeeds you have many months of comparative health before you; and if it fails—you have nothing to lose."

He stopped, waiting anxiously for her answer. But Mrs. Vallotson neither moved nor spoke. It was not the silence of reflection; it was not the silence of a woman who finds her intentions shaken by the arguments addressed to her. It was the silence of absolute resolution, and it impressed itself as such upon North. His face and manner grew keenly disturbed as he watched her, and he began to speak again, reasoning with her, at once with the greatest gentleness and a strong insistence.

"Will you not give me your reasons," he said, "and let me explain them away? Or would you prefer to see Grant about it? Believe me, he would not advise this step if he were not absolutely convinced of its necessity. He is trustworthiness itself, and he is by no means prone to such measures. I should not urge it on you if I were not certain that it is the right thing to do. And I do urge it most earnestly. To refuse, or even——" he paused and went on very slowly and deliberately—"to delay your consent is to refuse the one hope of reprieve held out to you, to condemn yourself to certain death."

"I will not have it done."

He might have as effectually addressed a woman made of stone. The iron determination of her face had not altered by a shade; the monotonous level of her voice was quite unchanged. Against the set resolution which she seemed to personify, argument was thrown away.

For a moment North hesitated, his eyes glowing, his face working. A vague instinct towards entreaty stirred in him. But there was that about the atmosphere which surrounded them, mother and son as they were, through which entreaty could not pass. He rose abruptly and turned away, and there was a long silence.

It was North who broke it. He lifted his head slowly from his hands, on which it had been propped as he leaned against the mantelpiece, and turned towards her. His face was drawn and white.

"I cannot press the matter further," he

said. "Professionally, of course, it is only possible under the circumstances to place the matter before you, to advise you and—to leave the decision in your hands. Grant shall know what you say."

He paused. He had not studied human nature, as every doctor must, for so many years without realising to the full the power exercised by indirect influences where direct argument has failed; and even as he accepted his defeat, keenly aware in his inmost consciousness of the hopelessness of the position, the instinct to try such side influences moved him in spite of himself. He waited a moment to recover his self-control, and then he spoke again in a grave matter-of-fact tone.

"I think you understand," he said, "that since you refuse, nothing whatever can be done to arrest the rapid progress of the disease. Something—though, I fear, in your case not a great deal—can be done to relieve the severe suffering entailed; and Grant will continue to attend you for the purpose. It will of course be necessary that you should have a nurse, and her presence immediately will be a comfort to you, I think. I will arrange for it to-morrow."

He had spoken uncompromisingly. Reserved as his words were, they were calculated to place before her in all its naked painfulness the prospect which she had to face. Absolutely in the dark as to the reasons which might influence her in her refusal of the proposal which he had made her, he had been guided by an indefinite notion that she might possibly be moved by a detailed realisation of the alternative which she was choosing. Her answer came upon him as an indescribable shock.

Mrs. Vallotton turned to him for the first time, and looked steadily into his face.

"I will not have a nurse," she said. "And I will not see Dr. Grant again."

A quick flash of incredulous dismay passed across North's face. Then he said gently and patiently:

"The nurse can wait, if you prefer it. But I think—I fear—that before many days you will find such care a necessity. As to Grant—do you mean that you would rather I attended you?"

She made a swift peremptory gesture of negation.

"I will not be attended at all," she said.

He smiled a slight, sad smile.

"I am afraid you will find it inevitable."

"Why?" she returned, an odd recklessness touching the stillness of her manner.

"Nothing can be done—you have just said so."

"Not quite," he answered gravely. "I said that a certain amount of suffering might be spared you."

"I do not wish to be spared."

"Ah!" he said, and there was a sharp note of agonised prescience in his voice. "You don't know what you are saying."

She looked straight up at him, her eyes sombre and unflinching, with something strange and indefinable hidden in their depths as she gazed at him for a moment in silence; there was a slight touch of scorn about her mouth.

"Do you think I am a coward?" she said.

Rough as was its manifestation, almost coarse as was its defiance of all assistance, there was something in the unyielding front, which thus faced certain agony and death, which touched North Branstons to the quick. He looked into the resolute face, haggard already with pain, and his sense of the atmosphere about them faded away; he felt nothing, he realised nothing but the rush of unspeakable compassion.

He drew suddenly close to her, and his words came quick and suppressed with the intensity of his entreaty.

"Mother," he said, "think again! Let us do what we can, all that skill and care may do. Consent, I beg of you."

She had started violently as his first word fell on her ear; and as he spoke she had let herself sink slowly back in her chair, her hands clenched, her face working painfully for the first time, as she stared up at him. She did not answer him immediately.

"Why should you care?" she muttered at last.

"Why should I care?" he echoed; his low voice vibrated strangely. "I am your son! Own me by letting me help you. Own me by trusting me. Own me by taking at my hands a little ease—a little longer life."

She was trembling from head to foot now. She tried to rise, but her shaking limbs refused to obey her.

"Life!" she said hoarsely. "Why should I want life? What's the good of life to me?"

"Might we not learn in it," he said, "to know each other better?"

"What then?" she answered. She had staggered to her feet, and stood holding to a chair to keep herself erect; her voice caught and grated with a strange despera-

tion. "What help is there in that? What help is there in anything?" She stopped abruptly, and then added in a low, brooding tone: "Not even my death will do any good. Not even my death! It will go on and on."

Before he could speak, before he could master the indescribable amazement stirred in him by the vaguely understood drift of her words, she had turned and made her way with stumbling, uncertain steps, and catching at the furniture for support, out of the room.

CHAPTER XLII.

BEATEN at all points, with all things converging towards the inevitable close, with all things falling back to leave the soul alone with the eternal mysteries of inexorable compulsion; those vague movements of the spirit, which the tremendous contact rarely fails to create, had become a part of the grim discipline which originally engendered them, and were to do their work unrecognised except as grinding pain. Fought against, rebelled against, denied, something had laid its chill touch upon Mrs. Vallotson; something too blind and groping almost to be called remorse. Face to face with death, that silent conqueror before whom no rebellion avails anything, she had begun to brood over the past. Orthodox and strict as she had always been in the conventional observances which represented her religion, spiritual perception was absolutely dormant in her. Right and wrong had been convertible terms, with her, with respectable and non-respectable. Just comprehension of what she had done; of the long chain of sin and consequence wound out in the tragedy of which she was the centre, was not for her. But gradually the past began to assume for her the proportions of a black mistake. It haunted her; it weighed her down; she could not escape from it. Writhe under it as she might, thrust it from her fiercely as she did during those long months of his unflinching patience and gentleness, the thought of North had been eating into her life. Something of the wrong she had done him began to shape itself before her; to grow into more definite proportions as her own state grew clearer and clearer to her. Her fierce reception of Lady Karslake had been her last stand against her consciousness. Strong and unbending even in defeat, she had become, during the three days that followed, its helpless prisoner.

Walled in and dominated, conquered

physically and mentally, life had become unendurable to her. The gift of a few months more was one to be hurled back upon the giver. She was to die; and she would die as she had lived, deliberately and of her own will.

What impulse, or what mixture of impulses, had dictated to her the resolution of accepting no relief in the inevitable suffering that must lie between her and the end; whether it had its origin in that stubborn pride which had guided her through life, or whether she set herself to endure, nerved and fortified by some strange half-heathen instinct towards expiation; it would be hard to say. The woman herself, as fortitude became the hourly habit of her life, could not have told. But from that resolution she never swerved. After that scene with North no word as to her state crossed her lips. Deliberately, and of set purpose, she had shut down an iron barrier between herself and all human help; and on the other side of that barrier her son stood helpless.

What agony of mind the weeks that followed held for North, no one but himself ever knew. Watching her as the days crawled by, the gradual development of her illness unfolded itself before him with dreadful precision. He knew that she was dying before his eyes. He knew that the ghastly stillness of her demeanour hid such suffering as tortured him to think of. He knew that she could know no respite by day or night. He knew that some sort of relief, that long intervals of oblivion, at least, lay in his hand to bestow, and that his hand was powerless.

Again and again he protested; passionately, sternly, entreatingly; all in vain. Long after her strength was reduced, as he knew, almost to nothingness she rose and came downstairs, passing from room to room according to her old routine, supported by her unflinching will; moving, however, only when no one was near to see what the effort cost her. He engaged a nurse, a woman who might have done for her almost as much as he himself could have done. But Mrs. Vallotson would not see her.

North grew haggard and worn. His work became for him a mere mechanical routine haunted by the thought of the gloomy house he had left and of the slow, silent tragedy that was there working itself out. When he was away from her he was consumed with anxiety, when he was in her presence the sight of her endurance was almost more than he could bear. Inside the house, or

outside, he rarely spoke. At the hospital it was said among his colleagues that "poor Branston" grew more taciturn with every day. He was too reserved a man to have intimate friends; and, liked and respected as he was, his private griefs could never become public property. There would have been no soul about him at this juncture to whom he could have spoken of that which was weighing on his life had it not been for the presence in London of Bryan Armitage.

Sympathy becomes precious and necessary to a man in proportion as his own capacity for sympathising develops, and there is no quality so surely refined and quickened by the discipline of suffering as the quality of perception where our fellow-creatures are concerned. The very feature in young Armitage for which North Branston had half despised him hitherto; his simple-hearted affectionateness, his honest faith, his quickness of feeling; made him now the one companion whose presence was to North anything but a heaviness and a strain. It had taken few words to convey to Bryan how matters lay; it took no words at all to draw out, day after day, his tacit unobtrusive affection and encouragement. It became a regular custom that he should appear at the hospital for a few moments some time during the day, either in his dinner-hour or just before North left. He never asked any questions; sometimes he would be full of the merest nonsense. But North never failed now to detect what lay behind his boyishness, and to respond to it with a half unconscious gratitude.

Five long, slow weeks had dragged themselves away, and it was a close, wet afternoon in May when Bryan, going as usual to North's room at about six o'clock, found North standing at his table putting away some papers.

"Ah, Bryan," he said, "I thought I should have missed you."

"Am I late?" asked Bryan cheerily. "I don't think so."

North glanced at the clock.

"Perhaps not," he said in a low voice.

"I am leaving a little earlier, I suppose."

There was a moment's pause, and then Bryan said:

"Are you more anxious than usual?"

North threw himself heavily into the chair by which he stood, clenching and unclenching one hand nervously.

"I don't know what I am," he said in an odd, hoarse voice. "I can see nothing but her face, Bryan! Her face as it looked this morning."

"Is she worse?"

"Yes!" he answered sharply. "It's drawing to the end, boy, it's drawing to the end; and she won't let me touch her. She tried to get up from her chair last night, and couldn't do it. She tried again, and couldn't do it. There were great drops standing on her forehead. I put out my hand to help her. She pushed it away and compelled herself. Good Heaven!"

Quite suddenly, broken at last by the remembrance of a scene through which he had passed rigidly composed, North Branston's self-control gave way. His face fell forward upon his arms as they lay upon the table, and a man's suppressed sobs shook him from head to foot. With his face twitching painfully, Bryan turned away.

It did not last long. In two or three moments those heart-rending sounds ceased, and North was very still. Then he raised himself slowly.

"I beg your pardon, Bryan, boy," he said. "That was hard on you!"

"I—hope you won't say that, North," faltered the young man.

North rose and came towards him.

"No," he said in a low, moved voice, "I won't, Bryan! I'll say—thank you. What should I do without you?"

There was a silent hand-clasp, and then North turned away abruptly, and began to finish the task on which he had been occupied on Bryan's arrival.

"Are you going to walk to the station with me?" he said, resuming his ordinary manner. Then, as he saw that Bryan was hardly ready to speak, he added: "It's a wretched evening."

It had ceased to rain, however, by the time North reached home. He paused a moment on the doorstep and looked up at the slowly clearing sky, a steady strength of endurance deepening in his eyes. Then he went in. He went straight upstairs. It had become his habit to see his mother always as soon as he came in, and then to leave her undisturbed till dinner-time.

It was growing dark on the staircase, and as he opened the drawing-room door the red glow of the evening sky, shining in through the window directly facing him, dazzled him for the moment. Then, with a sudden flash, his vision seemed to grow clear again, and he took in his surroundings at a glance. Everything in the room was just as usual; the chairs and tables were set about in their stiff, unused array. But the figure which had held itself so stubbornly erect was beaten down at last.

In the centre of the room, a few paces from the chair which she was wont to occupy, his mother lay face downwards on the floor.

The movement of the mind in any moment of supreme crisis is not to be explained, hardly to be defined. In the very moment of realisation all North Branstons being rose up in one passion of agonised yearning that he might not find her dead; that she might not have passed away for ever in the utter loneliness to which she had condemned herself. It was not an instant before he was kneeling by her side, but in that instant he seemed to live again through all the years of his life in one unspeakable pang.

She was not dead. His quick professional perception told him so even before he touched her. But as he laid his fingers on her pulse and looked into her ghastly face, oblivious in its blank unconsciousness who lifted it, and on whose arm it lay, he knew that the struggle was over, and that her body would obey her indomitable will never again. She was conquered to the uttermost. They might do for her what they would and she could lift no finger to prevent them.

They did what little might be done—North and the nurse—all that should have been done so long ago. Night drew on and the deathlike stupor was still unbroken. The nurse had left the room, and North, standing by the bedside, was gazing down at the livid features when he saw a faint movement pass over them. He laid his fingers quickly on the wrist lying on the counterpane, not knowing that it might not be the end; and as he watched, he saw her eyes slowly open. She could not move; she was too weak even to withdraw her wrist from his fingers, if she had wished to do it. That she would accept her utter helplessness was the only thing that might be hoped for her. And knowing this and seeing recognition in her face, North spoke to her, his voice low, steady, and professional.

"Do not speak more than one word," he said, "but try to answer me. Are you in great pain?"

She did not attempt to speak; she did not even seem to hear his words. Her hand lay heavy and passive in his; her eyes rested on his face, sullenly, quiescent at last—the eyes of the conquered, but with a strange faint hunger in them. At last her lips moved, and he bent his head to catch the feeble voice.

"Send for Constance!"

NORWAY.

For a long period of years it has been the fashionable custom to regard Switzerland as pre-eminently the country to go to for holiday purposes. Grand, however, as it undoubtedly is, there has of late sprung up another prominent rival to vary the monotony of the ordinary routine of well-travelled districts, and to add one more to the many facilities already afforded to the tourist for seeking "fresh woods and pastures new." Norway—for that is the country referred to—is rapidly acquiring great popularity with tourists in general, and no wonder, for its stupendous mountains, magnificent valleys, waterfalls, and fjords, are the admiration of every one whose privilege it has been to see them. Norwegian scenery is unquestionably grand in the extreme; to describe it is an almost impossible task, even to those who possess special merits that way and whose vocabulary covers a very wide area. The only way to form anything like a true estimate of its grandeur is to see the country with your own eyes, and, having once seen it, it will be strange if you do not possess an emphatic craving to see it again. Some enthusiasts have gone so far as to say you will never go anywhere else. Absurd as the latter assertion appears to be, it is not altogether a fable, for the impressions produced by those rocky, precipitous mountains, which frequently have a sheer declivity of several thousand feet, the great winding fjords with their numerous twistings and twinings, and the lesser offshoots with their almost impenetrable narrowness; the innumerable waterfalls at every turn, often falling from a height of one to two thousand feet; and last, but by no means least, the magnificent, fiercely wild, awe-inspiring valleys, some of which are reckoned amongst the finest in the world, are of the most profound description. The Norse people are kind, polite, hospitable, and honest to a degree, especially those in the country districts. They are ever ready to do a kind act, will treat you well, and charge you little for it. As yet they are to a large extent unspoiled; there are, however, unfortunately some indications that this blissful state of simplicity will not exist for ever, a circumstance for which Englishmen are chiefly responsible. Generosity at holiday times is proverbial, hence services rendered are usually well paid for. Norwegians are now finding this out, and, naturally, are not slow to appreciate it at its

proper value. Still, their idea of wealth is very different to ours; give a man a coin of the value of, say, sixpence, he will smile all over his face, hold out his hand, place it in yours, and give it a hearty shaking; indeed, from his manner, you would get the impression that he thought he was too well paid at that. At present there is nothing like the amount of imposition practised that is the common everyday feature of most Continental tourist centres; whilst, as a matter of fact, if you were to leave all charges absolutely to the natives themselves, it is more than probable that the result would be quite as satisfactory as if you had kept a keen eye on the expenses yourself. It is said that, if so inclined, you might safely go to sleep by the roadside and no one would ever attempt to divest you of your valuables. So much from the side of honesty. As already indicated, Norway is a poor country, and its people are likewise correspondingly poor. They battle with difficulties, brave adverse elements, live where other people would starve, and literally get bread out of stones, and, withal, are thankful for what little they do get.

Their industries consist, chiefly, of fishing, farming, and wood-cutting. Fish is largely used for home consumption, and considerable quantities are exported in the fresh and dried state, a fair proportion of which finds its way into English markets. Farming can never be a flourishing institution with them—and in this respect the fundamental basis of national prosperity is wanting—for the land is so mountainous and rocky, that few facilities are afforded for the development of this important and very essential industry; although, be it said to their credit, wherever there is a piece of land worth the labour, it is seized upon and utilised to the utmost advantage. At the best, however, the soil is but poor, whilst even the most favoured districts would find it difficult to get the smallest patch of land equal in quality to that which is common in our own country. Here and there small areas of level or slightly undulating land may be observed from which fairly respectable crops are secured, but these are quite the exception. Most farms are situated on the slopes of mountains in the most incredible, out-of-the-way, dangerous places it is possible to conceive of, often at an almost perpendicular height of some hundreds of feet above the level of the fjords below. How the natives manage to find land in such rocky places, and contrive to cultivate it under such dangerous conditions, and,

above all, to eke out a living, is an absolute marvel; but the greater surprise is how they manage to exist at all under such extraordinary trying circumstances. Their loneliness and fearful surroundings must be wearisome in the extreme, particularly when the meteorological conditions are not of the best, which is often the case in Norway.

For weeks, and probably months, during their long winter, their little homesteads must be literally icebound, and all communication with the outer world completely cut off. Yet, in spite of such adverse elements, they overcome the difficulties and thrive in a remarkable manner. Two or three small fields, a few sheep and goats, seem to be all that is necessary to make the modest Norwegian farmer contented and happy with his lot. He makes little money and spends less; his facilities for the latter are so limited that he rarely gets the opportunity of squandering it away. Many of the necessities of their simple mode of living are produced on the farm, whilst not a few articles of wearing apparel are woven and manufactured in their own homes. Whilst looking at these mountain farms perched on giddy heights, one is forced to confess that it is indeed a hard struggle for life; yet, from a Norwegian point of view, matters are not quite so bad, financially, as they seem. Whilst sailing along one of the famous fjords, the captain of the steamer overheard some of the passengers expressing themselves in sympathetic tones respecting this struggle for life, when he interposed, and pointed out that the farmer whose farm attracted attention at that time was what they—Norwegians—called a rich man, because he was worth some three thousand kroner, the English equivalent of which is just short of one hundred and seventy pounds.

Farmers do not always rest content with the land they get on the mountain slopes, but often secure any advantage that is to be derived from any flat surface that exists on the summits of mountains several thousand feet above sea-level. Here there are wooden huts erected, called *sæters*, which are occupied during the summer months only, and are used for dairy purposes as well as place for living in. The occupants of these *sæters* are usually two or three women, whose only companions are a few goats and sheep, unless, as sometimes happens, travellers, who may perchance be crossing the mountains, have a look in, and partake of a little refresh-

ment by the way. The interiors of these saeters are sometimes scrupulously clean, while others are much below that high standard of merit. The question might reasonably be asked if there are any crops grown on these high levels, how are they brought to the lower level? The answer is an interesting one. A novel arrangement is in vogue, which consists of a stout wire fixed firmly from the summit to the ground below at an angle of from thirty to forty degrees, to which the crops—chiefly grass—are attached and sent down at lightning speed, producing a great whirr and whizz as they speed their way rapidly to the bottom. There is usually such a copious supply of rain in Norway, and many of the valleys are so narrow and hemmed in by huge mountains—where the sun hardly ever shines—that when there is a grass crop, it is necessary to bring into requisition what might be described as a crude sort of trellis work, or in easier parlance, a series of clothes madens upon which to put the grass, in order to ensure the necessary drying process.

A feature in Norwegian farming is the very large share women take in duties appertaining to the cultivation of the soil. So frequently did we observe operations conducted solely by women, that we were repeatedly tempted to exclaim, "Where are the men?" Determined to solve this little problem, we put the question point-blank, and learned in reply that it is quite a common thing for women to bear the brunt of field work, as the men are often absent from home, travelling to distant fairs and markets in order to dispose of their produce, and for the purpose of buying and selling cattle.

The timber trade forms another essential part of the industry of Norway. The presence of innumerable pine forests is a sufficient indication of the importance and value of this branch of trade to the Norwegians, as, in addition to a comparatively large home consumption, considerable quantities are exported to various parts of the globe.

The Norwegian mode of travelling is somewhat of the primitive order. Railways are scarce—indeed, very scarce—the only one we came across during the whole of our travels is that one which covers a distance of sixty-eight miles, extending from Bergen to Vossevangen. How much this line cost to make it is difficult to say. It must, however, have absorbed a fairly substantial sum of money, for it has been cut through

solid rock, and passes through no fewer than fifty rock-hewn tunnels. Failing the advantages derived from the presence of the iron horse, there is in vogue a system of posting which enables persons to drive from one station to another, at fixed absolute rates, in vehicles constructed to hold one, two, three, or four persons. Those most in use are the Carriole, a vehicle designed to hold one; and the Stolkjaerre, with seats for two. In each case the attendant, or Skyds-guts as he is called, finds a place at the rear, although usually it is only a standing position. The Carriole is a comfortable sort of machine, and quite a novelty in charioteering. Not so the Stolkjaerre, for it is a much less inviting vehicle, possessing back-breaking qualities of the very first order. In some cases springs are dispensed with; thus, if perchance the roads are rough—as is often the case—and the path be downhill, you will be sure to know all about it, and feel it too. In order to ensure the successful working of the posting system—especially in country districts—any farmer may be called upon at a moment's notice to provide a horse for a traveller, and, no matter what hour of the day or night it may chance to be, or what other circumstances may arise, he is compelled to produce it. If, at that particular time, he should be busy ploughing in the fields, it makes no difference, he is bound to produce the horse. This, on first thoughts, appears to constitute a hardship; such, however, is not the case, for whatever duty the farmer performs of this description, he receives a stipulated rate of pay, and although the amount may appear small in our eyes, yet the poor Norwegian farmer estimates it in a much more favourable manner, for he finds it more profitable than pursuing his ordinary avocation, and accordingly is eager to seize any opportunity that presents itself.

Temperance people will note with pleasureable satisfaction that drunkenness is quite a rarity in Norway, a circumstance due largely, if not absolutely, to the adoption by the Government of the Gothenburg system, which places all profits on the sale of intoxicating liquors in the hands of the Government, who wisely use the money for local improvements. An instance in point may be seen in the construction of a splendidly-engineered zigzag road, exceedingly steep, called the Dram Vein, which runs up the side of one of the Bergen hills. Sellers of these liquors have no interest whatever in pushing the trade; in

fact, they are under certain restrictions which limit the supply to each individual purchaser. Wines and spirits, as a rule, cannot be had on board the local steamers, except by the courtesy of the captains, who are at liberty to supply small quantities as a gift, but not to sell and receive payment for same. That the Gothenburg system leads to the most satisfactory results is proved by the fact that Norway is very essentially a sober nation, and that an intoxicated person is rarely ever met with. It is perhaps hardly necessary to state that Norwegians make excellent sailors, indeed every one must have heard of their great reputation in this capacity, even from childhood. Some of the finest navigators the world has ever seen claim their birth in the land of the Vikings. Another characteristic of Norsemen is their remarkable suitability for colonising. Their hard, exposed lives among the bleak mountains, and the peculiar circumstances which compel them to do everything for themselves under trying conditions, eminently adapts them for the severe struggle that awaits them in those far-off, semi-barbarous countries, whither they go for the purpose of realising their fortunes.

The love of home is so profoundly deep-rooted in Norwegians that, after a few years' absence, they invariably return to the solitudes of their former homes among the mountains, and having amassed a few hundred pounds, settle down as men in happy, comfortable circumstances, and of some standing.

The Norwegians are a devout people. The form of worship observed by them is that of the Lutheran Evangelic, but owing to the scattered population and the distance between each church, services are only held once every two or three weeks. Ministers having districts assigned to them visit each church in turn, and are usually favoured with comparatively good audiences, as the people travel for miles in their little boats in order to be present. The wedding customs have always been extremely curious and interesting, although some of the observances and festivities have of late fallen into disuse. The bridal crown is still worn; it is gilded, and contains many sparkling gems, the value of which may be estimated according to the wealth and position of the parties concerned. In any case, it presents quite a remarkably fantastic appearance. It is usual for one or more of these crowns to be kept in each village for the use of the inhabitants generally, more particularly

the poorer people, who borrow it just as a wedding-ring may be borrowed for the day in this country. There are also a number of other items, which, when put together, form a sort of apron, covered with green and gold trimmings, and a fancy border, the whole of which is studded with imitation rubies, etc., and richly embroidered. The bridegroom, also, is often decorated in a somewhat fanciful fashion to match.

The natural features of Norway may be classed as unique; indeed, it would be difficult to mention any other country in which there is so much that bears such marked characteristics so peculiarly its own. The configuration of the land, with its sheer rocky declivities; its snow-capped mountains; immense glaciers; wild, weird-looking valleys; the gigantic fjords, with those of smaller dimensions; its waterfalls, with varying descents, of from fifty to two thousand, or even three thousand feet; its gorges, its avalanches, and many other characteristic features, all go to make up a combination which is essentially Norwegian, and which probably cannot be matched by any other country in the world. To compare it with anything English would, on the face of it, be absurd; still, those who have not yet visited the land of the Vikings may see something, although only in miniature, in some parts of Scotland—particularly in the vicinity of the Sound and Isle of Skye—that will give some faint idea of the splendour of Norwegian rock and fjord scenery. Loch Lomond, Loch Awe, Loch Achray, Loch Long, and Loch Fyne may do something to improve the impressions, but, after all, they are a very long distance off high-water mark. Other features present themselves in prominent fashion. For instance, there is the midnight sun, which, however, requires a visit to the North Cape to see it to perfection. The late evenings and early dawn are items of peculiar interest and pleasure. There is practically no night from the middle of May to the middle or end of July; thus is created a novelty which in itself is sufficient to arouse the curiosity of tourists generally, and Englishmen in particular. There is something strange indeed in strolling about at eleven p.m., or later, in broad daylight, with no indication of what we are accustomed to call night. To gauge the hour of bedtime by appearances is quite a difficult matter, whilst should you happen to be awake at about one a.m., you will discover that whatever darkness there may have been has completely vanished, and that the pure

light of heaven reigns instead, and that the sun is shining brilliantly as though it had never set, nor ever intended to do so.

The atmosphere in Norway is so clear and light that under favourable conditions very long distances may be covered with the naked eye. It is no uncommon thing for forty or fifty miles to be seen without extraneous aid of any kind.

HAIR-GROWTHS.

SINCE the hair, whether braided or dishevelled, adds so much to the character of the human figure, we need not wonder that peculiar fashions and customs respecting it have prevailed among all nations. The heathen priestesses, when under the influence of what they conceived to be inspiration, wore their hair dishevelled, for which reason Saint Paul forbade the Corinthian women, when at devotion, to wear it in this manner. Hence, in the early ages of Christianity, when its Divine doctrines were struggling through the darkness, the clergy, both regular and secular, were obliged to have the crown of the head shaved as a signal of self-denial and mortification. It was not until the fifth century that in Europe priests began to shave their crowns. The Roman clergy then adopted the circular method, and shaved the small round spot on the top of the head which is known as the tonsure. In Scotland, however, the monks shaved the whole of the forepart of the head from ear to ear. In the Andaman Islands every man shaves his head. Many other Orientals also go bald-headed. We used to do so in the last century, and by a strange piece of contrariness we wore artificial wigs to cover our baldness. As for the Chinaman, his method of shaving is exactly opposed to that of the Roman monk. He shaves all but a round patch, the hair of which grows long and forms his pigtail. When the difficulty of shaving the head is borne in mind, the true strangeness of the custom becomes doubly apparent.

The Popes denounced the wearing of long hair, and Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury, pronounced the sentence of excommunication on those who were guilty of so heathenish a custom. Serlo, a Norman bishop, acquired great honour for a sermon he preached before Henry the First in the year 1104 on this subject, which had such an effect on the King and his courtiers, that they immediately consented to cut away their flowing ringlets. The Roman

women dressed their hair in the form of a helmet, mixing false hair with it, which they contrived to fasten to the skin. They anointed it with rich perfumes, and by the aid of curling-irons raised it to a great height by rows or storeys of curls. They also adorned their hair with gold, pearls, and precious stones, sometimes with crowns or garlands, chaplets of flowers bound with fillets, or ribands of various colours. They used a certain plaster to pull off the small hairs from their cheeks, or plucked them up by the roots with tweezers, called *volsellæ*. Among the ancient Gauls long hair was esteemed an ornament; hence Julius Cæsar, having subdued them, made them, in token of submission, cut off their hair. Among the Anglo-Saxons and Danes, young women, before marriage, wore their hair unevenly and untied, but after marriage they cut it short, tied it up, and wore head-dresses of various fashions. Amongst the Greeks, both sexes, a few days before marriage, cut off and consecrated their hair to some particular deity. It was customary also to hang the hair of the dead on the doors of their houses previous to interment. The ancients imagined that no person could die until a lock of hair had been cut away, an act supposed to be performed by the invisible hand of Isis, and consecrated to the god into whose realms the soul departed.

The flesh perishes and the bones become dust, but the hair seems indestructible. There are even instances of the growth of the hair after death. At the monthly meeting of the Society of Antiquaries at Newcastle a few years ago, Dr. Bruce introduced to the notice of the members a photograph of the back auburn hair of a young Roman lady of the period, probably, of Constantine, judging from a coin found under the coffin. When the coffin was opened, the body of the young lady was found to have been buried in gypsum, with the head on a pillow. The front part of the skull had given way, and the back of the head was thrown forward, to which adhered a long folded tress of female hair, with two jet pins remaining in it. It may now be seen in York Museum. In the reign of James the First women wore small looking-glasses in their hair.

Among the North American Indians the hair grows to a remarkable length. One Crow chief had hair ten feet seven inches long. He wore it rolled up with a leather strap, which made the coiffure weigh several pounds, but on occasions of ceremony he let it hang over him like a mantle.

It is recorded that the luxuriant tresses of Mary Queen of Scots and Marie Antoinette became suddenly white from the horrors to which they had been subjected. The savage so seldom attains grey hair in Hudson's Bay that the Indians pray to Anina Boojah not for length of years, but to live "until the hair turns grey." In the middle of the fourteenth century yellow hair was the rage, a fashion the painters did their best to perpetuate by giving golden locks to all their madonnas, saints, and goddesses, and the mania lasted throughout the reign of Elizabeth. The ancient poets delighted in sunny-haired heroines, and many of the modern brethren of the lyre have followed in their wake. Tasso draws his Amazon with locks "spreading like sunbeams on the wind." Chaucer's Emilia boasted yellow hair, and all Spenser's women were golden-tressed. Golden-haired beauties may be found in Shakespeare. Lucrece's hair, "like golden thread, played with her breath," and Portia's sunny locks "hung on her temples like a golden fleece." Byron loved to sing the praises of dark-haired damsels, but Scott's Bride of Lammermoor had locks of "shadowy gold"; but the late Laureate pictures Aphrodite in the famous trial of beauty drawing

From her warm brow and bosom her deep hair,
Ambrosial golden, round her lucid throat
And shoulder.

Paule de Toulouse was a blonde, and whenever she went abroad she was pursued by such admiring crowds that the magistrates had to interfere to keep them at a distance. While the ancients generally depicted the Graces as fair, they gave dark locks to the Muses. Juno, Andromeda, "burning Sappho," and Cleopatra were dark-haired, so were Marie Mancini, the first serious love of Louis the Fourteenth, and Madame Maintenon, the last. Red hair was ever an object of aversion among the ancients. Ages before the time of Judas Iscariot red hair was a mark of reprobation. Auburn hair was thought the most distinguished, as portending intelligence, industry, and peaceful disposition.

It has been asserted that fair-haired persons have shorter sight than dark-haired, the reason for this belief being given as the number of spectacles worn in Germany, a blonde nation. But on the other hand, blindness reaches its highest European point among the Spaniards, who are conspicuously dark of complexion, and almost its lowest in Sweden. The two extremes of bad sight and good are found in Egypt

and the United States, the latter having the lowest ratio of blind population of any country in the world.

The Albino possesses a skin of a reddish or a dead white colour, with yellowish-white or milk-white hair, and red or very white coloured eyes. The hair over the whole body is usually soft and white, not of the hoary colour of age, nor the light yellow or flaxen tint of the fair-haired races. It is rather that sort of colour peculiar to white horses. These peculiarities evidently arise from a deficiency in the colouring principle; much is the same in the skin, hair, and eyes. The latter organs are in the Albinos peculiarly sensible to the stimulus of light, in consequence of a want of black pigment, the office of which is to absorb its superfluous portions. Hence we find the eyelids of these people generally closed, and the eyes usually exhibiting some appearances of morbid phenomena. But in twilight, dusk, or even a close approach to darkness, they see remarkably well.

There are wholesale firms in Paris which send round agents in the spring to various Breton and other villages. These gentlemen are provided with ribbons, silk, laces, haberdashery, and cheap jewellery of various kinds, paying for the maidens' glossy tresses in these goods or in ready money. So far as personal beauty is concerned, these Breton lasses do not lose much in losing their hair, for it is the fashion in that part of France for maidens to wear a close cap which entirely prevents any part of the hair being seen. Some years ago the light German hair was held in such esteem by the hair merchants that they gladly paid as much as eight shillings an ounce for small quantities of it—nearly double the price of silver. Light hair is still collected from Germany by agents of a Dutch company who make yearly visits to various parts of the Germania states. The black hair imported comes mostly from Brittany and the south of France, and is, as a rule, very fine and silken.

Within the present century the heads of hair of whole families in Devonshire were let out by the year. An Exeter perwig maker went round periodically, cut the locks, and oiled the ground thus left in stubble to stimulate a fresh crop.

Many curious spells are still practised in various districts of Great Britain, and associated with the hair. In Sunderland the crown of the head is shaved, and the hair hung upon a bush or tree, with the full faith that as the birds carry away the hair

so will the cough vanish. In Lincolnshire a girl suffering from the ague cuts a lock of her hair and binds it around an aspen tree, praying the latter to shake in her stead. At least one holy well in Ireland—that of Tubber Quan—requires an offering of hair from all Christian pilgrims who come here on the last three Sundays in June to worship Saint Quan. As a charm against toothache, it is necessary to go thrice around a neighbouring tree on the bare knees, and then cut off a lock of hair and tie it to a branch. The tree thus fringed with human hair of all colours is a curious sight and an object of deep veneration.

The practice of shaving probably originated at first from its being found that the beard afforded too good a hold to an enemy in battle. This is the cause assigned for the origin of shaving among the Greeks, about the time of Alexander; and in most countries we find that the practice is first adopted by military men, and that men of pacific and learned pursuits retain their beards much later. The Greeks continued to shave until the time of Justinian, in whose reign long beards became again fashionable, and remained in use until Constantinople was taken by the Turks. The Romans appear to have derived the custom of shaving from the inhabitants of Sicily, who were of Greek origin, for we find that a number of barbers were sent from thence to Rome in the year 296 B.C., and the refinement of shaving daily is said to have been first introduced by no less a person than Scipio Africanus. At the expiration of the Republic, beards had become very rare, and historians mention the alarm in which some of the Emperors lived lest barbers should cut their throats. For the sake of concealing the scars on his face, the Emperor Hadrian wore a beard, and this, of course, brought that appendage again into use, but the custom did not long survive him, although his two immediate successors wore beards in the character of philosophers. Among the Romans shaving did not commence immediately on the appearance of the hair; the youth was suffered to acquire a small beard, and the operation of shaving was performed for the first time with a great deal of ceremony. Persons of quality had the operation performed for their sons by persons of greater quality than themselves, and this act rendered such persons the adopted fathers to the children. The day was a festival; visits of ceremony were paid to the young men, who received presents from their friends; and the first

growth of the beard was solemnly consecrated to some deity, usually to the household gods.

The ancient German natives shaved the beard, except that on the upper lip, and what is expressly stated of one tribe was probably true of the rest—that they allowed no young man to shave or cut his hair until he had killed an enemy in battle. The ancient Goths, Franks, Gauls, and Britons also wore moustaches, the hair of which they suffered to grow to a very inconvenient length. The Saxons wore long beards, but at the introduction of Christianity, the laity began by degrees to imitate the clergy, who were shaven; they, however, still retained the hair on the upper lip. The Danes appear to have worn their beards. Sueno, the first Danish chief who invaded this country, was surnamed "Fork-beard." The Normans shaved their beards entirely, and looked upon the appendage with so much distaste, as an indication of misery and distress, that they were the great apostles of shaving wherever they came. Accordingly, they endeavoured to persuade or compel the English to shave the hair of their upper lips. The great majority yielded to the necessity of the case, but there were many who chose rather to leave the country than resign their whiskers. However, beards again had their day. In the fourteenth century they became again fashionable, and continued until the beginning of the seventeenth. At the latter date their dimensions had become much contracted, and they were soon after relinquished, the moustaches only being retained, and at the beginning of the last century the practice of shaving the whole face had become universal. In these latter changes the example of France was followed. In that country Henry the Fourth was the last sovereign who wore a beard, and he had a tolerably fine one. He was succeeded by a beardless minor, in compliment to whom the courtiers shaved all their beards except the moustaches. The succession of another minor confirmed the custom, and ultimately the moustaches also disappeared. The Spaniards, more tardily influenced by French example, kept their beards until the French and English were beginning to relinquish even moustaches. Perhaps they would have kept the cherished appendage; but a French Prince—Philip the Fifth—succeeded to the Spanish throne with a shaved chin. The courtiers with heavy hearts imitated the Prince, and the people with still heavier hearts imitated the

courtiers. The popular feeling on the subject, however, remains recorded in the proverb: "Since we have lost our beards we have lost our souls."

Goldsmith tells us of a Spanish general, who, when he borrowed a large sum of money from the Venetians, pawned his whiskers, which he afterwards took proper care to release. Kingston assured us that a considerable part of the religion of the Tartars consisted in the management of their whiskers, and that they waged a long and bloody war with the Persians, declaring them infidels merely because they would not give their whiskers the orthodox cut. The Kings of Persia used to carry the care of their beards to a ridiculous excess, when they chose to wear them matted with gold thread; and even the Kings of France, of the first race, had them knotted and buttoned with gold. But of all nations the aboriginal Americans took the greatest pains in cutting their hair and plucking their beards. The under part of the beard and all but the whiskers they took care to pluck up by the roots, so that many supposed them to have had no hair naturally growing on that part, and even Linnaeus fell into that error. Their hair was also cut into bands, and no small care employed in adjusting the whisker.

The authorities of Lincoln's Inn passed an edict in the sixteenth century under which barristers who chose to wear beards were made to pay double commons. Chancellors of the Exchequer are often at their wits' end to meet a deficit; but he would be bolder than most who would reimpose the tax of three shillings and fourpence exacted in Elizabeth's reign on every beard above a fortnight's growth.

It is contended that the hair around the mouth tends to impair the utterance of song and speech. The sounds are broken or muffled as they are projected from the mouth. Most of the famous lawyers, ministers, and parliamentary orators have been clean shaven. It is not known whether Demosthenes and Cicero wore beards, but we suppose Peter the Hermit, who preached the first crusade, and Walter the Penniless were bearded because they could not spare time to shave.

The comparative advantage and propriety of shaving and of permitting the beard to grow is, however, difficult to determine. On the side of beards it has been argued that Nature must have bestowed such an appendage for the purpose of being worn, and that, as Tertullian affirmed, it is

"blaspheming against the face" to reject it altogether. It is certain also that a well-kept beard adds greatly to dignity of appearance, and finely sets off other parts of the countenance, and in particular gives great expression to the eyes. A comparison of bearded and beardless portraits is generally much to the advantage of the former. We have heard much of the dignified and stately appearance of the Turks, but such a comparison enables us to perceive that most of their dignity is in their beards and their dresses. Then we must also take into account the trouble of shaving, which made Seume, a German writer, say, in his "Journal," "To-day I threw my powder apparatus out of the window. When will come the blessed day when I shall send the shaving apparatus after it!"

On the other hand it may be alleged that, as the beard has always been shaven wherever men became highly civilised, its growth must have been found incompatible with the convenience and refinements of such a state, and would be a serious incumbrance in many delicate acts. Besides, we find that, among all bearded nations, the beard has always been invested with peculiar sacredness, which preserves it from any kind of violation. When More laid his head on the block, he bade the executioner stay till he put aside his beard, "for," said he, "it never committed treason." When the Gauls entered Rome they found the city desolate, and on their arrival at the forum they beheld the venerable senators sitting within the building in an immovable attitude. One of the Gauls approached M. Papirius and stroked his hoary beard. In retaliation for this insult the old man struck him on the head with his sceptre, whereupon the barbarian slew him, and all the rest were massacred.

ST. JEAN PIED DU PORT.

WHERE the quaint Basque city stands,
Framed and fenced by warrior hands,
On its huge rock throned and crowned,
Mountains girdling it around;
There the strangers come and gaze
On the work of elder days,
Musing o'er the tales of old,
Gathered round the Border Hold.

There echoes rang of Roland's horn
From the Pass of Roncesvaux borne;
There the stern avengers came
Shouting their dead Hero's name;
There the fury of the Fronde
Swept the fertile plains beyond,
When against her royal foe,
Condé's Princess held Bordeaux.

There Hawkwood's reckless riders swept;
There Clisson's sword the city kept,
While the might of angry Spain
Round her ramparts surged in vain;
There our English Edward's lance
Held the lists for subject France;
There, when the eagles baffled fled;
Wellington his legions led.

There, to-day, the southern sky
On its heights gleams brilliantly;
Birch, and box, and poplars' sheen,
Clothed in April's tender green;
Gorse glows out, and peaceful broom:
Waves aloft his golden plume,
While with shade and shine at play,
Neve goes dancing on her way.

Up and down each narrow street
Peasants go; with patient feet
Sad-eyed oxen bear their load,
Where chargers pranced and pennons flowed;
While the citadel looks down,
Where, lapt in peace, the little town
Lies, heedless of its varied story,
Its stormy past, its ancient glory.

FICTION WITH A PURPOSE.

ALL fiction is written with a purpose—the purpose of making money. Wrap up the truth as you please, it is there. Let this man prate, if he will, of art for art's sake; that one, of the ethical intention, which should be the guiding force in the mind of every novelist; a third one, of the overwhelming sense of responsibility which should actuate and ear-mark the smallest thing he writes; others of this, or of that. Amidst all the mist of phrases, one clear, indisputable fact stands out: that the compelling purpose responsible for the production of—at a moderate computation—ninety-nine per cent. of printed fiction has been, is, and will be, money.

There are those who write for the writing's sake. Of such I, who write, believe that I am one. There never was a time when I did not scribble—for the love of it. Of all the trades in the world, there is none, as I judge, which can compare with the trade of a writer. But I never had any delusion as to its not being a trade; one at which a living could be made, by means of which one could earn bread and cheese, and, it might be, kisses. Gentlemen who would desire us to consider them as authorities have stated that this is an improper way to look at writing, and for this reason if for no other: because such a point of view militates against the production of good work. Possibly these gentlemen can explain why this should be so. One has seen the statement a good many times, but one still awaits the explanation. A carpenter does not cease to do good work because he knows himself to

be a tradesman. Indeed, one may reasonably suspect that it is because he knows himself to be a tradesman that he does good work. The amateur consistently fails to reach the tradesman's standard. To what extent, and in what respect, sometimes the skilled workman—the tradesman—only knows.

To say that because a man regards the trade of a writer as a trade, therefore he depreciates it, is to use words without a due understanding of their meaning. There are those who choose to speak of a spade as a spade, thinking that it does credit neither to them nor to the spade to speak of it as an agricultural implement. No one has a higher esteem for authorship than he who now writes of it. I do not believe that the thing can be. More, I incline to the opinion that those who, in certain directions, extol it as if it were in itself omnipotence, in their hearts regard it as less than I do. Here, for instance, is Mr. Hall Caine—a leader in Israel—going out of his way, as it seems, to join in the cuckoo chorus which is continually crying that all fiction should have an ethical purpose.

Rubbish! It is that cry which is responsible already for the majority of the twaddle which pours from the presses. It needs no swelling. A, getting a bee in his bonnet, writes a book in order to sting B, C, and D with it. It is not the book which is first and foremost in his mind; not, that is, the book for the book's sake, but the bee in his bonnet. People of this sort already are as the sands of the sea for multitude; they need no adding to. Certainly not under the impression that in increasing their number one shows one's love for literature.

Mr. Hall Caine, and those for whom he speaks, before telling us that all fiction should teach something, ought to induce the peoples of the world to arrive at some common understanding of what there is to teach. Are we to confine ourselves to the simpler virtues—such, for instance, as truth, honesty, courage? Well and good. Next we must have a general agreement as to what is truth—it will be remembered that that enquiry is historical!—what is courage, what is honesty. It does not follow that Quilpen's conception of what he calls truth is necessarily mine. If it is not, it is possible that I shall strongly resent Quilpen's attempt to cram his erroneous conceptions down my throat. As a matter of plain fact, I am continually resenting such attempts on the part of innumerable persons who approach no nearer to my standard.

abstract truth than does Quilpen. As an individual who wishes to be written down as one who loves literature, I do not thank Mr. Hall Caine for his apparent wish to enlarge their boundaries.

This idea—which, alas, is becoming increasingly prevalent—that everything should teach something, even fiction, is founded on wrong bases. At the root of it is the notion that the preacher, as a preacher, is a person of importance. He may be. But there is some one of more importance—the writer. Preaching means wrangling. Whatever you may preach some one will preach the exact opposite, not to speak of the great army who will dilate on the infinite shades of difference which exist between the two extremes. And which of the preachers is undeniably right no one shall say, certainly neither you nor I. The writer is apart from and above these things. He moves among them, and he looks on, and he sees, but declining to join in their profitless contentions; he prefers, without fear and without favour, to set down what he sees, and so compels the whole company of the preachers to see themselves in their own strange images. He is the greatest master of fiction who approaches nearest to reality, who does most to help us to understand that most complex of all problems, ourselves. It is not for the novelist to tell us what to do, but to show us what we are. If we know what we are, then, perhaps, we shall know what it would be best for us to do. No one shall be able to tell us continually what it were best for us to do if we do not know ourselves; be sure of that.

It has always been an axiom of the Church of Rome that, on certain subjects, it is better that we should have our thinking done for us. If we concede the truth of this, then it is possible that there is no abstract reason why a novelist should not do it for us as well as any one else. By all means let those who wish to be saved the trouble and the wear and tear of mental effort attain, if they can, salvation. And it is their business rather than anybody else's if their saviour takes the shape of the latest fictionist. If a writer of stories chooses to write up, or down, to people of this sort let him; but the fact of his being conceded such a liberty is an insufficient reason why he should not, with a good grace, concede his fellows liberty to decline. The worst of a preacher is, be he novelist or layman, that he will let neither his friends nor his foes alone until he has at least endeavoured to run them into the same

mould in which he has himself been fashioned. Thus it comes about that when a man writes what he is pleased to call "novels with a purpose," he is apt to spend his moments of precious leisure in informing other men who write that they ought to write "novels with a purpose" too. That plane of perfect tolerance, in which men do as they choose without moving one hair's breadth to persuade other men to become their imitators, is still up higher.

It is curious how small a measure of popularity seems to be associated with the idea of the work for the work's sake. That any one should do a thing simply for the mere pleasure which he has in doing it, people seem to find it difficult to understand. The general voice appears to assert that everything which is done must be done with some ulterior design. Quilpen did not write that fine story of his, "The Tea Drinker," merely for the love of writing it, but to display the evils of temperance—or, if he didn't he ought to have done, because the evils of temperance are therein displayed. When one is oneself behind the scenes, one begins to suspect that, occasionally, no one is more surprised to learn the purpose for which a book was written than the man who wrote it—if he can only keep his countenance during the moment in which the thing's discovered, it may be that his fortune's made. Young Scrawler happened to come across a good idea, worked it up into a story, sent it the usual round, and finally succeeded in having it offered to the public in a decent binding. The book fell flat, until one of those keen-sighted critics, who can see through ten brick walls, perceived that it was intended as a veiled attack upon the Fortieth Article. Scrawler was astounded—he found himself accused of a desire to promulgate a form of heterodoxy of which he had never even heard. But being wise in his generation, he pleaded guilty, crammed the subject up, and, as all the world knows, is at present the high priest of a flourishing sect, and issues his sermons in the guise of fiction to his disciples and others in editions of twenty thousand at a time.

When one reflects, one perceives that it is impossible to write a story which does not teach something, which a critic of a certain sort is not able to assert, with some show of reason, was not written with a purpose. I have in front of me a list of some three or four dozen works of fiction which have lately issued from the presses. I am morally certain that not one of them was

written—*ab initio*—with any definite sermonising intention, and yet it is indisputable that each of them might be described as an exposition of some particular text or texts. As a matter of fact, some of them have been so described.

There are certain so-called critical journals which seldom pay much attention to a novel without ascribing to it distinct ethical teaching. The number of teachers and preachers—in spite of themselves—which these journals have created, is not a small one.

That man of singular modesty, Mr. W. D. Howells, has recently been informing the nations that in England we have no fiction which can be properly so-called—why? Because our novelists do not take themselves sufficiently seriously. That blessed word *Mesopotamia*! The man who does take himself seriously is a perilously near relation to a prig, and from more of them, angels and ministers of grace defend us!

The consciously serious man sits unconsciously for his likeness as a fool, and no one discovers that an error has been made. The man who deliberately, and in cold blood, wishes the world to take all that he says and writes gravely—oh, what a man that man must be! Certainly, Mr. Howells himself is serious enough, and his books are serious things. If but occasionally they weren't, how much wiser, nobler, more informing, and—may one add?—more readable they would be.

The serious man is prone to be a dull one; it is undoubtedly the truth that the dull man understands nothing which is not serious. Experience would suggest that, as regards novelists, seriousness is their latter and worse end. The tyro begins light-heartedly. It is only when success comes that his light heart goes—alas! the light hearts of his readers are apt to vanish too. It takes a wise and a strong man to gauge what success actually means. Rotist finds that his tales are selling by the twenty thousand. People in print and out of it tell him that he occupies a proud position, one, moreover, of great responsibility. He enters a hundred thousand homes, whispers into the ears of a million reasonable creatures, is the chosen companion of their hours of privacy. What a privilege is his! What an influence! What will he do with it! Is it possible that he will be content to continue the mere teller of idle tales; to frivol away the great power which has

been given him? Think of what he might do if he chose. Won't he choose?

If Rotist is a wise man, and a strong one, he won't. Unhappily one's knowledge of past and present novelists leads one to fear that, when it comes to the sticking-point, they are neither strong nor wise. They yield to the cuckoo cry. They suffer themselves, perhaps not unwillingly, to be over-persuaded—to the point of believing that there is something better than a teller of tales. They permit themselves to become convinced that a great novelist is, perforce, a serious one; that funniest of fancies. If Wilkie Collins had been strong enough to stand against the fallacy, his latter work might not have fallen so infinitely below the standard of "*The Moonstone*" and "*The Woman in White*." Had George Eliot been possessed of sufficient moral backbone to enable her to put it behind her, we might again have had the good stuff of "*Adam Bede*," instead of the shoddy of "*Daniel Deronda*." Charles Reade gave us the only work of his which is likely to live, when, for once in a way, he got the cuckoo cry out of his brain, and wrote for the mere sake of telling the tale which was to be told—"The Cloister and the Hearth."

Because a man's stories are sold by the hundred thousand, it does not necessarily mean that he is a man of "weight" and "influence," in the sense in which those words are so commonly misused. Still less does it mean that it would be better if he were. It means—or if it does not it ought to—that he is a master of his art—the art of telling tales; that he is a round peg in a round hole. He will be a fool if he tries to square it. If he can only get away from the rucks of the cuckoos, who, to our sorrow, are in England the harbingers of a cheerless, sunless, but eternal spring—they are with us ever!—and consider the matter fairly, squarely for himself, he will perceive that the man who can give the heavy laden peoples of this workaday world pleasant hours, of which the memories shall be as glimpses of sunshine, even under leaden skies, is indeed a Wizard of the North—as they so aptly dubbed Sir Walter—a Great Enchanter, whose seat is of right among the highest. Owing to some queer twist in our poor humanity, few men are content to merely lift the cares from off the shoulders of their fellows. Theoretically we say that, than he who lightens our burdens, none could be a greater benefactor; in practice it would

seem that we hold it otherwise. Else how is it that he who adds to the scanty stock of mirth which is in the world should be urged by so many voices to gird up his loins to show the manhood that is in him, and to strive to go up higher? If he is already on the summit, looking down upon the smaller elevations, how is it possible for him to go up higher?

That is a good trade which seeks to add to the world's cheerfulness. To produce an article which shall not only cheer the peoples for the passing hour, but which, for all we know, may be handed on through the years to lighten a dark hour for some who are yet unborn. A difficult trade to boot. Many are its apprentices; few indeed have in them the making of a master. The most of them continue—if they do continue—journeymen unto the end. A master not only must be born, he also must be made. I take it that there never was a master who was not apprentice first. It is true that Sir Walter stormed the world with "Waverley," but had we been his shadows, we should have known that he had served his articles unto that hour. But though he must be apprenticed, the story-teller must also certainly be born. The man who asserts that any one can write a story, confesses that he himself will never be other than a journeyman. It is possible that, in the sense in which he speaks, any one can tell a story—as witness the large company of the little ones who place themselves on exhibition between two covers. But to tell a good story well, the man must be born. Not by taking thought alone shall he do it—never! Thought may shape, but the thing which may be shaped is an embryo, which is a gift of God. Unless it was already given us when still we were in our mother's womb, of ourselves we shall never get it; not though we serve faithfully an apprenticeship of ten times seven years.

The gift of the story-teller is the gift of God. To different men their several gifts. This man is an entomologist, this a carpenter, this an orator, that an engineer, by the act of God. Possibly, in a sense, mediocrity may be anything. One is told, for instance, that So-and-so would have made his mark "in anything." If it be true, it is because he is a mediocrity. He who is, say, an entomologist by the act of God will never make his mark in anything but entomology, because God has been beforehand, and marked him with his own mark, before the man himself was born.

The man who is a story-teller by the act of God may strive to be something else, but he won't succeed. The witnesses, living and dead, are on every hand.

So, when some one says that all fictions should have a purpose, he addresses himself to mediocrity. The fictionist, by the act of God, cannot help himself. He must either move on the lines which have been ruled for him, or fail. Conceive Walter Scott writing "with a purpose" if you can. Or Thackeray. They tell us that Thackeray is one long sermon. Yes, but who is prepared to suggest that when he sat down to write a book, he ever troubled himself about "a purpose"? Thackeray was a great showman. He showed us men and women as they are, and, walking with them from the cradle to the grave, laughed and cried with them by the way. He would be a clever and a bold man who should endeavour to tell us what was the standard of ethics which Thackeray preached. For my part I have wondered if he had not always in his mind how easy it is to be decently honest on five thousand pounds a year. Is that a standard of ethics, good Mr. Moralist?

Give me your facts; leave your deductions to whom you will. From the same set of facts a thousand men will draw a thousand opposite deductions. Tell your tale; the moral to it I will find myself—if there is no moral, perhaps the better. One is surfeited with morals. There is such a host of them; they are so at variance with each other, the wise man shuns them like the plague.

The error which is at the root of all the talk about "a purpose" is that notorious fallacy which, although exposed a million times, still lives gaily on—the fallacy which supposes that people are easily persuaded. If it is necessary that the "moral teaching" of a book should be "good," it is because it is supposed that by reading it people can be persuaded to be "good." If that were so, what a world this world would be. Of course, such a supposition is arrant nonsense. The great majority may be fools, but they are not fools of the calibre which the contemporary creed suggests. It all comes of our conceit. Each man knows that he himself is not a fool, but—to put it civilly—he thinks it just possible that his fellow is. Thompson is perfectly aware that the good, bad, or indifferent "moral teaching" of no book he ever read, ever affected him one jot or tittle, but—conscientious creature!—it might affect Brown, Jones, and Robinson. You see, he

is strong; while the others—well, they may be weak. Thompson, in such a case, seems to be typical of human nature in England up to date. We none of us have the least fear for ourselves, but we are so dreadfully afraid for our next-door neighbours. And so, while we ourselves take down Zola from his place upon the uppermost shelf, to our wives and kindred, we recommend those lower rows of volumes, whose strongest, and also weakest point, is the "purpose" which gave them being.

I doubt if any book that was ever penned ever induced a man or a woman to do one single thing which he or she would not have done just the same if that book had never been. I have been, for some considerable length of time, on the look-out for a well authenticated case which goes to prove the contrary, and am likely to keep on looking. Mere assertion will not serve; what is wanted is the visual, the scientific proof. As for "moral literature" promoting morality—which the promoters of the unconscionable sweating religious publishing societies would have us believe it does—the thing is balderdash. Worse, the man who fathers such an assertion is making himself responsible for a statement which, from his own experience, he must know to be false. If you want to draw, at popular prices, bad characters to a theatre in paying numbers, the attraction must be a truly moral play. There must be no paltering with the conventional standards; vice must be vanquished; the hero must be stainless, he must not be guilty, or capable, of a single doubtful thought or action; the virtuous heroine must be triumphant in the end. If you want to attract the wife-beaters of the Black Country, give them a stage picture of unalloyed domestic bliss; the drunkards of the potteries, a play illustrating the evils of drink; the thieves of the "Cut," a drama dealing with the trials and temptations of struggling honesty—they will "prig" the "ticker" out of your pocket to procure the funds to enable them to go and see it. It is a peculiarity of our complex constitution that we are, so many of us, disposed to go out of our way to see folks damn the vices we are inclined to. We have all heard of the baby-farmer who used to cry for hours over the "pretty tales" which describe with such "natural" and "pathetic" touches the sufferings and "beautiful deaths" of children.

On this point I have a theory, which, probably, is some one else's. We know how opposites attract each other—fair

women dark men, and vice versa. They recognise, consciously or unconsciously, that each has what the other has not. May not the same thing occur in all the relations of life, even in literature?

Is it not possible that the non-critical reader, who simply seeks to gratify his or her natural taste, likes to read about what he or she is not, and—nature and circumstance having been beforehand—cannot be? There must be some such explanation—because the thing is. As for being changed by what they read, made, in any way, new creatures—that any one can believe that that results is a striking commentary on the credulity, to say no more, of the age. Here is Mr. Hall Caine telling us that all fiction should be charged with a high purpose, that a novelist should be a preacher. Why? Because direct, or even indirect, results are likely to ensue? "The Manxman" is a fine story. It has powerfully affected thousands of readers. I have heard several ladies speak of it in what seemed to me to be almost exaggerated terms. Is Mr. Hall Caine prepared to affirm that any man or woman who is predisposed to make a mess of his or her sexual relations, will be prevented from so doing by reading "The Manxman"?

Concerning immoral books, or books without a purpose, or with what some omniscient censor declares to be a bad one. People talk so loosely that, for my part, I am very far from being sure what an immoral book is; but of this I am very sure, that no moral person was ever made immoral by one yet. Neither morality nor its opposite is so easily convertible. What we come into the world, we remain; at any rate, not all the literature of all the nations will have anything to do with changing us. Writers who suppose it will both overvalue and undervalue the craft they follow. Fiction is simply a reflex of the age in which it was written. When we look back, we see that it is so. It is only when we take contemporary observations that our vision becomes obscured. If an author writes a polemical pamphlet and calls it a novel, when the alterations desired by the pamphlet come about, loosely thinking folk exclaim that the pamphlet did it; cooler observers, living two hundred years afterwards, looking back, see that matters would have been as they were, even if the pamphlet had never been written, that, in fact, it was but as a straw upon the waters, serving to show which way the tide was flowing.

The novels which live, and will live, are those which were obviously written for no purpose save the pleasure which their authors had in writing them. Polemical novels, novels with a moral, with a purpose, are with the snows of yester-year, for which we may be thankful. If they do survive it is simply as curios, at which we look and wonder. Defoe wrote a good deal with a "purpose," which is dead. He wrote one thing without a purpose—that's immortal. "Pilgrim's Progress" was written with a purpose, or Bunyan thought it was. What percentage of those who read it think of its purpose? That purpose killed it for more than a hundred years. It was only when that part of it—which was mortal—was dead that the story—which was immortal—revived. A good tale lives for ever, for æons after the teaching which it was intended to illustrate is forgotten. The one is but the dirt which clogs the wheel, the other is the wheel itself.

It is not only presumptuous, it is futile for any one—be he a Daniel come to judgement—to suggest that novelists should write either with or without a purpose. If Quilpen wants to know what he ought to write, it does not matter one pin's point what he writes. The only printed stuff which commands attention is that which is inevitable; which a man feels he must write, and which he does write, although all the moralists—and all the critics with them—advise him not to. For such an one there is only one kind of work which he can produce, and that is what he does produce. To offer advice to such an one is like offering advice to the wind; whence the wind comes we know not, nor whither it goes; it is of God. That sort of man is rare. Advise the other sort if you will, it makes no difference. Found a school; let the master instil his principles into his pupils; let them be quick to learn, deft in putting into practice what they have been taught. It is not of any consequence. Even when they had put out Samson's eyes he pulled down the pillars of the Temple. When the strong man does arise, he will tread down in front of him the well-drilled scholars; they shall be as naught even though he never does arise. To my thinking, the man—be he writer or reader—who hies to another man to be told what he ought to do with his manhood, though he live to threescore years and ten, will scarcely have any manhood to deal with.

Ought fiction to be written with a purpose? Certainly; for the purpose of making money. Even bad fiction ought to be written for the purpose of making money, and above all good fiction. Beyond that, if you who are about to write it do not know of yourself with what purpose it ought to be written, as a fictionist you are but a cipher, by the act of God, and though you sell by the fifty thousand—which we will pray you may do—not all the wisdom of men will make of you anything else.

RICHENDA.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "The Thirteenth Brydain," "Catherine Maidment's Burden," "Benefit of Clergy," "The Vicar's Aunt," etc. etc.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was about six o'clock on a March evening. The latter end of that variable month was proving itself so bright and so warm as to be almost oppressive; and the brightest of evening sunlight was slanting in at the low windows of one of the rooms in Miss Leicester's house in Kensington. It was a room at the back of the house, and on the top storey; an out-of-the-way, quiet corner, protected by an angle of the house from the noises of the street, and looking out only on a small, quiet stable-yard. It was known to the household in general as "Mr. John's study." Miss Leicester, who was as anxious to help her brother to work hard as he himself was to do the work, had installed him in it early in the second term of his work in the hospital school.

Jack had chosen it himself, after much consideration, as the quietest room in the house. He had, further, furnished it himself, more or less. The result of his tastes had produced one or two odd incongruities. For instance, though he preferred, he said, an uncarpeted floor, as being more "practical-looking," he had allowed himself two very choice bookcases, in which an imposing array of abstruse literature was displayed; and in front of a severely plain writing-table was a very comfortable chair. He had stretched his theories also, so far as to allow himself a luxurious-looking hearth-rug, and beside this was a low basket-chair. This was for visitors, Jack always sedulously explained. Whether he himself ever occupied it in moments of leisure he never told; but he certainly worked too hard to have many such moments.

On this particular evening he was fully exemplifying his principles with regard to his chairs. For he himself was seated on an ordinary cane chair, facing the back of it; and in the basket-chair nearly opposite was installed a visitor. The visitor was Sir Roderick Graeme. He had a cigar in his hand, and he was leaning back in the basket-chair as if he were thoroughly and comfortably at home in "Mr. John's study."

And such, in truth, was the fact. On the evening, now more than two months ago, on which they first had met each other, Jack Leicester had conceived an odd admiration and liking for Sir Roderick Graeme. Even if Jack had been given to analysis of his feelings, which he was not, he would have found it impossible to say why he had begun to like Sir Roderick, and what it was in the young man that attracted him. As it was, he never even thought of his own feelings on the subject, he simply accepted them. He had made up his mind on that first night that Sir Roderick was a "good sort of fellow," and wished that chance would again throw him across his path. Chance was kinder than usual to Jack. A few days later, on his way home from his work, he ran against Sir Roderick in Piccadilly, and straightway asked him to come back with him "for a chat," as Jack expressed it, with cheery confidence. Sir Roderick could not, as it happened, but he walked much of his way home with Jack, and then parted with an arrangement for a future meeting.

This appointment Sir Roderick kept very faithfully. He was drawn towards the friendly, simple-minded boy. There was something in his own nature responsive to Jack's. He was pleased, too, to be sought after so openly and frankly; to be so evidently cultivated for himself alone. And he was prepared, even had he been far other than he was, to take an interest in Jack Leicester, an interest that was not all for his own sake.

So the acquaintanceship had prospered until now it was a somewhat odd, but very firm friendship, and it had become a very usual occurrence for Jack to find Sir Roderick ready to walk home with him when he came out from his long day's work. He sometimes also found Sir Roderick established in his study, quietly smoking and waiting for his return. This had happened on this special evening, and the two had been talking together for some half-hour or so. A silence which

had fallen on them seemed to be the break in an argument of some sort; an argument in which, to judge from his expression, Jack Leicester had been by no means able to gain his point, or maintain his ground. He was restlessly tilting his chair first on to its front legs, then on to the back, while his white, freckled forehead was wrinkled with a series of frowns, each more perplexed than the last. Sir Roderick meanwhile smoked, calmly and slowly, watching the thin blue rings of smoke, as they curled up from his cigar, with an unperturbed and a very decided expression. His face had altered somewhat since that January afternoon when he had called upon Richenda.

It was more thoughtful, certainly, and there was a shadow on it which, though present on it then, had been only fleetingly visible. Now it had settled down into part of his expression, making his face much older, and rather sombre.

"It's really most awful rot!" broke from Jack, suddenly and almost ferociously.

"My going to Queensland, you mean?"

Sir Roderick spoke evenly and quietly, and replaced his cigar again the moment after he had spoken.

"What else have we been talking of? What else am I likely to mean! I call it simple idiocy!"

"But you're in favour of work for all men. You've said so often enough, and reproached me with my lazy life pretty smartly and roundly! I'm going to do some decent work at last, that's all."

Sir Roderick smiled, just a little bitterly.

"Work!" said Jack impatiently. "Yes, I believe in work, of course; you ought to have had some to do years ago," he added, with frank unreserve. "But what I feel is that if you've waked up to the idea, you surely can get something to do here in London, or at any rate in England. Why don't you go and look after your tenants in Scotland, pray?"

"Because my factor does it much better, and there is simply nothing left for me to do."

"Fiddlestick!" was the abrupt answer. "I mean you could learn the tricks of that trade as well as any other. It's an awful mistake to go out and bury yourself in Queensland."

"Thank you!" said Sir Roderick drily. "I trust my first use of my new 'claim' won't be to make it my burial ground!"

"Don't be a fool, Graeme!" was the retort. "You know what I mean as well

as possible! You know that I simply hate the thought of losing you."

Jack gave his chair a twist, which produced an ominous creak. And then his shrewd eyes scanned the other's face covertly. The frowns deepened sharply on his forehead as he said deliberately:

"Among all the other reasons I needn't go into, I should miss you most horribly when I want to slang Kennaway a bit. You are the only man who knows how I feel about him; how I loathe the thought of him for Richie."

Jack paused, letting his shrewd eyes still rest on his friend. Sir Roderick gave two long puffs at his cigar, and watched the large blue rings curl away with a perceptible tightening of every nerve and muscle in his face.

"I mean to go," he said in a hard, strained voice. "That's all about it. But as to your feelings, Jack, you can let them off every day until I'm gone, if that'll be any good. I'm ready now!"

"You're rather playing the fool, old fellow." Jack's answer came in a queer, reflective tone. "As to Kennaway, I suppose, as a matter of fact, you know what I feel as well as I do. I've hated the whole thing since the day Richenda told me that they were engaged; before it, for that matter. I can't endure the fellow; I simply can't. He is a cad; he is a brute; he is a fool! There!" said Jack, half apologetically for his words, half as comment on the sounding crack his chair gave for the second time.

Sir Roderick flung the end of his cigar away, and laid himself back in the basket-chair, with his arms stretched up to his head and his hands clasped on his brow in such a way as to shade the face from the shrewd eyes opposite. He did not speak.

"I have to say these things about Kennaway sometimes," pursued Jack, "or I should choke! You see," he added, after a little pause, "I'm so helpless in the matter. I can't bring any proof to Richie of these assertions, and naturally she wouldn't listen to me without it. And I do believe she really likes him, I do, indeed. That's the worst of it!"

"You'll have to look out for your sister, and keep an eye on him when they're married."

The words seemed to come from the depths of Sir Roderick's throat, somewhere, they were so hoarsely and hesitatingly spoken.

"I know!" Jack returned with a sort

of groan. "I know I must. But I'm not much good, you see, being so much younger. I can't be up to a man like Kennaway. Now, if you'd give up this fool's plan about Queensland and stay and help me, I'd——"

"I'm going to Queensland, old fellow. That's certain. And I must be off, now, to my diggings." Sir Roderick had risen abruptly, while Jack was speaking, and his words cut equally abruptly into the other's speech. "Come with me for a step or two, will you?" he added.

Jack nodded, and reached his hat from the table.

Three minutes later, the two were standing together on the doorstep of Miss Leicester's house. They were outside, and Jack was just feeling in his pocket to make sure that he had his latch-key, when two other people suddenly appeared. The house was a corner one, and they had just turned the corner. At the sight of these two Jack gave first a smile and then a frown; Sir Roderick lifted his hat with a set, pale face. The new-comers were Miss Leicester and Fergus Kennaway.

Richenda was looking very pretty and charming in soft furs. She smiled at Jack; and returned Sir Roderick's greeting quite simply.

"Just going out?" she said cheerily to her brother. "We've just come in; from a matinée. And we've been horribly bored, haven't we, Fergus?"

"Horribly," assented Mr. Kennaway. He seemed to be absorbed in fitting the key Richenda had handed to him into the latch. His greeting to the other two had been of the very briefest sort, and he did not even look round when they, with a farewell to Miss Leicester, went down the steps, and disappeared round the corner.

He unfastened the door, and admitted Miss Leicester into her house in silence.

"Come into the drawing-room," she said, "and I'll send for some tea."

"I can't imagine," was his only response, spoken in a decidedly irritated voice, "why you allow that fellow Graeme to hang about the premises as he does. This is the third time I've come across him in the past two days."

They had ascended the stairs and reached the drawing-room by this time. As Kennaway finished speaking Richenda was standing with her hand on the bell. She pulled it rather sharply, and then she turned round.

"I can't imagine what you mean," she

said. "Sir Roderick is Jack's friend. I can put no check on Jack's seeing his friends, even if I wished to. But I don't," she added, sinking into a comfortable chair and loosening her furs, "I don't in the least. I never am at all concerned in the comings and goings of Jack's friends. They do just as they like. I scarcely even see them. To-day is the first time for weeks that I have chanced to see anything of Sir Roderick."

"Very likely," Fergus Kennaway's voice had lost a little of its irritation, but it was still far from agreeable. "But I don't think you'll get the world in general to believe that, Richie. And too much going and coming of men about an engaged young woman isn't the thing, to my mind."

Richenda coloured hotly.

"I wish," she said almost sharply, "that you wouldn't call me Richie. I like my proper name best, please."

"Surely I may call you what I like now?"

The question was spoken in a voice that would have been sneering if Fergus Kennaway had not covered the sneer in it with a trifling polish.

"No. What I like," was the tart response.

Fergus Kennaway had seated himself in a chair opposite to Richenda, and was leaning back in it with a sort of easy "master-of-the-house" kind of attitude, which was rather arrogant, considering that as yet he was Miss Leicester's guest only. He smiled only at Richenda's sharp answer, and crossed one leg over the other lazily.

"As to the rest of what you say," she pursued, "I think, Fergus, that, until we're married you had better let me take care of myself. I assure you that I am quite capable."

Fergus Kennaway was manifestly prepared to respond to this in much the same strain as that which had dominated his former speeches, but something in Miss Leicester's face seemed to say that he had gone far enough. He glanced at her, and changed his expression and his tone entirely.

"Come," he said, in an irritatingly conciliatory fashion, "at any rate, we won't quarrel about it. The question isn't worth that, certainly."

It appeared that his suave voice jarred on Miss Leicester even more than his commanding one. She drew herself up in her chair, her face set into lines of vexation, and was just about to speak when the words were checked on her very lips by

the entrance of the servant with the tea she had ordered. In the servant's presence she made a few commonplace remarks on the play they had seen, and Kennaway answered them in the same trite fashion. But no sooner were they alone again than she said coldly:

"The question is worth a great deal. If you think me not to be trusted now, I shall scarcely meet your wishes when I am your wife. My conduct is, now, as it will be then, governed by my own sense of right and wrong alone."

Fergus Kennaway was standing before the prettily-appointed tea equipage, holding in his hand the cup of tea which Richenda had just given him. He was in the act of helping himself to sugar, but he let the sugar-tongs fall with a little clash as she spoke. Then he set his cup down and went round to the side of Miss Leicester's chair. There was a dim sort of alarm visible in the expression of his face, and a deeply-rooted determination in his small, untrustworthy eyes. He leaned over the back of it and took Richenda's hand.

"My dear love," he said very suavely, "what is all this about? I can't think what we have been doing. We aren't far from quarrelling, I do believe, and about absolutely nothing. Be reasonable, my darling! Is it likely I should wish you, love, to act in any way but that which your wishes dictate to you? The day that is coming next month isn't going to turn me into a tyrant, Richenda!"

He spoke her full name with careful emphasis, and perhaps it was because of this small but tangible attention to her wishes that Richenda's countenance brightened and changed. Her vexation slowly but surely gave way to a smile, and she held up her face to meet the kiss he bent down to give her.

"Come and take your tea before it is quite cold," she said, freeing herself with a pretty gesture from his detaining hands. "Have you found out yet about that Italian route you said you would investigate?"

Kennaway came back to the table and took his tea-cup from it. Then, re-establishing himself again in the opposite chair to Miss Leicester's, he plunged into lengthy detail concerning their honeymoon destination.

CHAPTER XIX.

"I SAY, Leicester!"

"Well, what do you want?"

"I want you. Come here a bit, can you?"

It was two days after his talk with Sir Roderick; and Jack Leicester had just finished a long day's work in the hospital school. He was standing at this moment in a small room opening out of a large passage in the hospital buildings. It contained a small reference library for the use of the students; and Jack, on the top of a flight of library steps, was stretching out one hand towards a bulky volume on the topmost shelf, when he was first addressed. The speaker was a fellow-student of considerably higher standing than Jack; but he was a great friend of Jack Leicester's, in spite of the difference between their positions. They had been at the same school together in their earlier youth, and Jack Leicester looked up to him now with a deference that he considered due to the other's superior training and acquirements.

"I am here," returned Jack. "What do you want, Norton? Say it, can't you?" Norton hesitated, and his rather unusually grave face took a still graver look.

"I rather wanted to see you by yourself," he said slowly.

Jack let the heavy volume fall back with a bang into its place on the shelf, and sat down abruptly on the top of the steps.

"What is it?" he exclaimed.

"I wish you would come off that," said Norton insistently, by way of answer.

With his shrewd eyes wide with wonder Jack complied.

"I am by myself," he said. "Shut the door, and let's hear what you are making all this fuss about. This is as good as anywhere else."

Norton had walked to the window of the little room, and was standing gazing out of it with his hands in his pockets when Jack joined him.

"Out with it," Jack said briefly.

Norton turned round slowly, rattling some loose pence in one of his pockets as he did so.

"Well," he began slowly, "if it's true it's nothing pleasant I've got to say, in the first place; and in the second, it's as likely as not that I've discovered a mare's nest. But you had better just hear it, at all events."

"What is it?" said Jack, impatiently this time. "Don't be all night."

Norton's manner was beginning to make some impression on him. An undefined sense of something unexpected to come had obtruded itself into his mind, though he strenuously denied it a place there.

"Look here," the other said. "You know the night you took me to your place you told me that your sister was just

engaged to be married? And, if I'm not mistaken, you said the man's name was Kennaway—Fergus Kennaway, wasn't it? Or did I imagine that outlandish Christian name?"

"No, Fergus. Fire away," Jack said briefly. His eyes were fixed on his friend with strained attention now.

"All right. Well, an accident came in this morning. Several did for the matter of that, but this was a woman."

"A woman? Well?"

"I'm coming to it, young'un! Don't be in such a hurry! She was, I gathered—I happened to be about when the case came in, and the policeman told me—a country woman. She was partly drunk, and partly unused to London, and she had got herself run over. It was a very nasty smash—I won't go into details now. But I went round with Franklin-Jones an hour ago—the second round, you know—and she was delirious. They've put her into a private room. And in her delirium—I heard her myself, Leicester—she calls incessantly for some fellow named Kennaway."

"It's a common name," said Jack. His face was very pale, and the words broke from him almost defiantly.

"Fergus isn't!" was the terse rejoinder. "And when it isn't one it's the other. The two are incessantly on her lips, and she evidently expects some one to come to her in answer to her cries. I thought I'd better tell you. Don't turn blue all at once." Jack was staring rigidly out into the street. "It's as likely as not she's his sister, or his cousin, or his aunt. And it mayn't be the same man, you know—only I thought you ought to hear."

"Thanks!" Jack said gruffly.

"They've sent for whoever it is, anyway," Norton continued. "She had a crumpled up half-sheet in her hand—a bit of a letter written on club paper. And they've sent—I forget where, but wherever the paper belongs—to see if he's known there, and to tell him to come. That's all, Leicester, and I'm most awfully sorry, old fellow, to have had to tell you. I thought it over a good while. I came to the conclusion that it looked so fishy that you ought to know."

"Thanks, awfully!" said Jack briefly. He held out his hand to Norton, and then without another word, he took up his hat from the ledge of the bookcase where he had laid it, and went out of the library, out of the hospital building, into the street.

His head was in a whirl, and the noise of the street seemed to make its confusion

worse. So he turned back into the hospital quadrangle, and began to walk up and down the stone pathway that ran round it. Only one thought would take shape in his brain; and that was that he was touching something he had expected for a long time. And the more he realised this, the more his confused brain asserted it, the more he was overwhelmed with so sudden a justification of his dislike to Kennaway, so sudden a verifying of his vague suspicions as to Kennaway's private history. He was almost stunned by the way in which Norton's story tallied with them all. It was not that he had ever formulated anything definite against Kennaway; but it seemed to him now that he always must have known something definite against him; as if he always must have been waiting for and expecting this to happen.

In the midst of these thoughts one dominating idea burned itself into his brain, making all the rest into a sort of background; and the thought was—Richenda. If there should be something that must be told to Richenda, how would she take it? How would she feel it? Would it—and Jack fiercely swallowed something in his throat—would it break her heart?

He had just reached this point when a banging of doors and a clattering in the corridor brought to him the remembrance that the quadrangle would soon be thronged with his fellow-students; and to avoid them he turned abruptly out into the street again. He turned towards home. He had

no definite purpose in his mind whatever: no practical idea before him, save that he must get home and think over what he was to do.

He was just turning into the main thoroughfare from the street in which the hospital buildings were situated, when a hansom stopped at the corner. Jack took no special notice of it, nor of its occupant, until just as he reached it he heard the latter say to the driver:

"You can wait about here for me."

Jack started, turned, and found himself face to face with Fergus Kennaway.

Kennaway started too, visibly, and his eyes contracted curiously. But not a muscle of his face moved.

"Hullo!" he said carelessly. "How do? Done your laborious day, eh?"

Jack did not answer, and Kennaway went on.

"I've been told of an awfully good sort of semi-private cigar place in these parts, but I'm hanged if I can find it. You don't know it, I suppose?"

"No." The monosyllable came curt and sharp.

"Hard work imparts an admirable polish to the manners!" said Kennaway superciliously. "I think I must try it myself! I'll walk a hundred yards or so with you if you like!"

"No, thanks!"

With this Jack turned abruptly on his heel, leaving Kennaway staring after him with a face white with anger, and muttering a curse below his breath.

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By MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

*Author of "A Valiant Ignorance," "A Merc Cypher,"
"Cross Currents," etc., etc.*

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE midday express from Alnchester to London was tearing steadily across the country. It was a sunny May day, and even the commonplace landscape which stretched away on either side was beautiful with blossom. But there were two passengers by whom, though one of the two never moved her eyes as they gazed fixedly out of the window, the loveliness about them passed absolutely unheeded. Alone in a first class carriage, facing one another as they sat in the corners on either side of a window, were Bryan Armitage and Constance Vallotson.

At twelve o'clock on the night before, North had come to Bryan's rooms with a brief account of Mrs. Vallotson's collapse and of her one request; and with an enquiry, equally brief, as to whether it would be possible to Bryan to go down to Alnchester and fetch Constance. Bryan had made it possible, and at five o'clock in the morning he had left London. He had reached Dr. Vallotson's house at about ten o'clock, and on the two hours that followed he never cared to dwell. Even now, as he sat opposite Constance in the train, he could hardly realise that she was actually with him. He was taking her bodily presence to her mother's side; so much concession had been wrung from her—and through her from her father—by such strongly worded representation as had never issued from Bryan's lips in all his life before. But her soul, as he knew well, remained untouched. Bryan's honest face

was a trifle colourless and weary. He had had no sleep on the previous night, and he had compressed a double journey into the shortest possible space of time. But far stronger than any trace of physical fatigue, as he glanced now and again at his companion's averted profile, was the pain and anxiety which made him look stronger and more manly by ten years.

The change which the past eight months had wrought in the face so stubbornly turned from him was as great as it was pitiful to see. From Constance's small brown features the girlishness had gone for ever. They were thin, pinched, and sallow. Sharpened and accentuated to the extreme point of their unpleasant possibilities, those traits of expression which had been laughable when softened by the charm of youthfulness stood out now frankly confessed as grave faults of character. The self-confidence had become hard self-assertion. The superiority had become narrow intolerance. The pronounced little chin and nose witnessed to the steady growth of a sour contempt which condemned wholesale. The whole face would have been simply and wholly disagreeable to look at, if it had not been for an indescribable wretchedness that pervaded it, that lurked in the hard dark eyes—terribly like her mother's—and seemed to create their sharpness.

The journey was half over and she had hardly moved or spoken. Bryan had tried to induce her to eat the sandwiches with which he had provided himself for her benefit, only to meet with a monosyllabic refusal. The light was beginning to change from the full radiance of midday to the first suggestion of afternoon shadow; he had been watching her for some time in silence when he leaned a little forward in his seat and spoke.

"Connie," he said quickly and diffidently, "do you think that any fellow creature stands beyond the pale of our pity?"

She turned her head and looked at him for a moment, her face unmoved and contemptuous.

"Perhaps not," she said; her voice was hard and thin. "I have not considered the question."

"If you had heard your mother's story told of some one with whom you were unconnected, wouldn't you—even if you had thought most of the other people on whom the blow fell—have pitied her a little, too?"

"You are arguing quite unnecessarily," she returned. "I do pity my mother. Otherwise I should not be here."

Her lips set themselves into a firm implacable line as she turned her head deliberately away, as though to close the conversation. But a quick exclamation broke from Bryan.

"We use the same word, Connie dear," he said; "but we don't mean the same thing. Pity, as I understand it, means tenderness, sympathy. It means seeing misery when we should otherwise only see wrong-doing; it means wanting to relieve that misery. It's pity like that that holds us all together. Don't we all need it every day of our lives?"

She moved her hand impatiently on her knee.

"That's a theory," she said, in a low, sharp tone. "Theories are quite useless. They have nothing to do with things as they are!"

He looked at her for a moment with a vague uncertain light, struggling with the perplexity of distress with which his eyes were full. Ever since they met that morning—meeting after an interval of nearly ten months—he had been seeking blindly and most unhappily for some clue which should bring him in touch with this new Constance, about whom his instinct, only, could detect any trace of the Constance of old. Only Bryan, who had known her so well and so tenderly perhaps, could have detected the clue afforded by the sweeping assertion to which he had just listened. And only so straightforward a nature could have pursued it with such simple courage.

"It all depends on which one begins with," he said quietly. "If one arranges one's theories from life it's all right enough. But if one develops theories first, and looks to make life square with them——"

"No one would be so foolish as to do that!" she interrupted.

"Not knowingly," he said gently. "Certainly not."

She turned with an irritable movement, and fixed her eyes once more on the country; and Bryan paused to consider his next words. Hardly a moment had passed, however, before she spoke again.

"You think I'm very hard, Bryan? You're quite right, I am. I cannot help it! I don't want to help it! I am not going to argue the point with you! Men are always sentimental about women like my mother! I simply ask you if you suppose I wanted to feel as I do! You know I didn't! You know I stood on higher ground than other girls about such questions. I could reason. Do you suppose it was pleasant to me to be shaken to the most contemptible depth of feeling?"

She had spoken bitterly and passionately, her set manner breaking up with every word as though the contact with her old playfellow influenced her in some subtle way. And as she finished, throwing the question at him fiercely, self-contemptuously, something of the old Constance, the Constance whom he had played with, argued with, and loved ever since he could remember, seemed to lurk in every tumultuous line of the small pinched face. Bryan flushed hotly, but he spoke very simply and steadily.

"Connie," he said, "that's it! That's why you don't quite see the rights of things. You could reason, but it's no use to reason unless you can feel too. When feeling seems contemptible to one, one's all wrong. Look here, dear," he went on, speaking very earnestly and with a great effort, "you say you stood on higher ground than other girls? Now, that's the question! What is higher ground, and how does one get there?"

"Knowledge is higher ground," she answered defiantly. "A calm capacity for clear thought, for facing points that are usually ignored. And one gets there, of course, by right of brain power and its proper use."

"You're wrong, Connie," he said. "Look here, I don't like talking to you of things like this, but we must have it out! Knowledge alone isn't higher ground, and brain power alone will never bring us up to it."

"What will, then?" she demanded scornfully.

"Sympathy, I think," he said. "The sympathy that comes of trying to do what

we ought ourselves and knowing how horribly hard it is. And higher ground is higher insight and experience, that's all! Don't you see, Con, that even if you had known as much as you thought you did it wouldn't have given you insight; phrases and facts can't do that. It's got to grow, gradually, you know."

There was a moment's silence and then she said dubiously but thoughtfully:

"Then do you mean that if I had had more—insight—I should have been able to take it more as I should have wished, more calmly?"

A sharp ejaculation broke from Bryan.

"Good heavens, no!" he said in a quick, moved voice. "Connie, can't you see at all what I mean? Insight doesn't make one calm in the presence of sin and misery, it only makes one's feeling deeper and tenderer."

"Is that a better thing?"

He leaned forward impulsively and took her hands in his.

"You know it is," he said. "If you could forget all the phrases that made playthings of these things for you before you could realise what they meant, if you could get outside the narrow conceptions you've taken for truth, and let your womanliness have fair play, you wouldn't want me to tell you so."

She turned her face away from him sharply, but she did not withdraw her hands. They were trembling. There was a long silence, and then she said in a strange, uneven voice:

"Do you mean that she is really dying?"

He had watched her face, and the transition of her ideas was no surprise to him. His fingers closed more firmly round her little shaking hands.

"Yes, dear!"

"And she asked for me?"

"Yes."

She looked round slowly; the small brown features were quivering.

"Bryan," she said tremulously, "I wish—I wish you had come home sooner. I have wanted you very much."

And then—they neither of them quite knew how it happened—they kissed each other for the first time since Connie was ten years old.

The afternoon shadows were growing long as they drove rapidly through the London streets. Constance was very pale and quiet, and her face was eloquent of an awestruck suspense. Bryan, too, was grave and silent; and not a word had passed

between them when the cab finally slackened speed, and Bryan looked quickly up at the windows of the house. He turned to her instantly and said gently:

"It's all right!"

Then he helped her out; the door was opened to them almost at the same moment, and Constance caught nervously at his arm.

"Where is North?" she said tremulously.

"When shall I have to see North?"

He had never seen her shaken or unnerved before, but it seemed to come quite naturally to Bryan to steady and support her.

"There he is," he said tenderly, looking along the hall to the top of the staircase. "He is coming down to us now."

A man's step sounded on the stairs, and at the same instant North came within sight. Bryan felt the girl start violently, and knew that she was shaking from head to foot. He drew her gently on, and the next moment North had reached them. He held out his hand to Constance with grave kindness.

"I am very glad to see you," he said in a low voice.

"We are in time?" said Bryan.

"Yes!"

North opened the dining-room door as he spoke the one grave word, and tacitly suggested that Constance should go in. She obeyed him mechanically, but, once inside the room, she turned and spoke in a subdued voice.

"May I not go up?"

North looked at her white, agitated face.

"You are very tired," he said. "I would rather that you rested for a little, and had something to eat first." He paused and added very kindly: "She will not know you, Constance. She is unconscious."

"But—she will?"

"Yes," he answered, "I hope so."

A meal was waiting for the travellers, and, as if influenced in spite of herself by his manner, Constance tried to follow North's injunction to eat something. She was quite composed, though she was still very pale when, half an hour later, she said hurriedly, but not unsteadily:

"North—let me see my mother now."

Again he looked at her carefully.

"Are you rested?" he said.

"Yes!"

"You understand that she is quite unconscious?"

"Yes!"

He rose, and Constance followed him

without a word out of the room and up the stairs. With his hand on the door of Mrs. Vallotson's room he stopped, and looked round at the girl with a great pity in his eyes.

"Constance," he said, "are you prepared to find her greatly changed?"

She nodded. He saw that she could not speak, and that delay was but a cruel kindness. He opened the door and led the way into the room.

The quiet that had brooded over the house for all those months seemed to be concentrated at last between the four walls of that one room. It was large and square, conventional in its appointments, and adapting itself easily in its bare neatness to the characteristics of a sick-room. The sun had set, no afterglow had caught the windows, and the fading light had a sombre effect. The nurse, whose quiet movement, as she rose on North's entrance, hardly seemed to touch the silence, was seated by the bedside; and on the bed, rigid and motionless, lay the only other figure that the room contained.

North did not hesitate. He led the way straight up to the bedside, and Constance, with her hands clenched tightly together, followed him. North did not look at her. He heard a low strangled catch of the breath, and then the quiet settled down upon the room again as they stood there side by side, gazing down upon the face of the woman who was the mother of them both.

Was it indeed her mother? Looking at those sunken features, wrapped in their impenetrable insensibility as in a dreadful mask; those features blank and expressionless but for the lines of resolution and endurance graven too deeply ever to be effaced; a sense of unutterable strangeness fell upon Constance. She could not speak, she could not feel; a chill of awe had fallen on her, and all her faculties seemed frozen. At last she became aware that North was speaking to her. She looked up slowly, and knew that he repeated his words.

"She suffers nothing while she is like this," he said very gently. "Come down now. You shall see her again by-and-by."

He laid his hand upon her arm, and drew her out of the room. Glancing at her face as he closed the door he saw that it was working convulsively; but no sound came from her until, as he opened the dining-room door again, Bryan Armitage started up and came eagerly towards them.

And then she broke into a low, bitter cry.

"Oh, Bryan, my mother! my mother! Oh, Bryan, Bryan!"

The next moment she was clinging to him in a passion of sobs and tears, and North shut the door softly and left them.

Two hours passed before he came downstairs again, and then Bryan met him in the hall. Constance was quite worn out, he said; she would go to bed if North would promise that she should be called if there should be any sign of consciousness. A little stir succeeded in the house; and then North, who was to spend the night in the sick-room, acceded to Bryan's urgent entreaties that he would spare himself during the brief interval that yet remained before his watch began; and the two sat together, silent companions, in the dining-room.

Ten o'clock struck, and North rose.

"Good night, Bryan," he said. "Go to bed."

"I shall go to sleep whether I go to bed or not," returned the young man ruefully. "Good night, North!"

The servants were moving about below, shutting up the house. As North went up the stairs the quiet, subdued sounds gradually died away; he heard, as he opened the door of the sick-room, the door of the room in which a bed had been improvised for Bryan Armitage close softly; and out of the quiet of night, as it fell upon the house, he passed into a quiet deeper still.

No perceptible change showed itself in the room, except inasmuch as it was lighted now by a lamp so placed that the slightest change in the face of the patient would be visible to the watchers. The figure on the bed lay in the same blank stupor. As North entered the room the nurse was standing by the pillows looking attentively into the unconscious face. She turned as he approached, giving place to him silently and watching him furtively. He studied the face on the pillow quietly for a few seconds, then he asked a few brief technical questions.

His catechism finished, he turned from the patient to the nurse.

"I need not keep you any longer," he said. "You had better go to bed at once."

The woman hesitated, and her eyes wandered to the bed.

"There is a change, sir, don't you think?"

She spoke diffidently, but it was eloquent

of the infinite remoteness of the figure on the bed that neither of the speakers had lowered their voices beyond their natural pitch.

"Yes," answered North quietly.

He said no more, and the woman turned away. At the door she stopped.

"Good night, sir!"

"Good night!"

The door opened and shut. He heard her step pass on up the stairs; he heard the sound of a closing door; silence descended for the last time that night upon the house.

Alone, in the heart of the silence; alone with that rigid figure, eloquent alike of the mysteries of life and death; alone with the tragic centre of his whole life's meaning; North Branston looked into his mother's face, and read there the beginning of the end.

The change there manifested was very slight. The colour had altered indefinitely, and the lips looked pinched and sunken; but to the trained eye the indications were distinct enough. Looking down now upon her unbroken stillness, North knew that it was not the insensibility induced by anæsthetics that held her; that it was the final stupor of exhaustion. Absolutely motionless she lay there. She had been a fighter all her life; strong, bold, and resolute. She had fought against the world, and conquered. She had fought against the hand of God, and fallen. She lay now as the weakest and the strongest creatures upon earth must lie, so touched by the lord of life and death; and the sands of her life ran slowly out, unheeded of her any more, not to be checked by any power on earth. Not to be checked; not to be retarded in their passing. They might move rapidly, they might move slowly; but the regulation of their movement had passed beyond the reach of human hands. Unhastily, unfalteringly, the work of life tended towards its final consummation—death.

The weeks of preparation seemed to fade away out of North Branston's life; the world and all it held seemed to recede; leaving him face to face with that which each moment as it passed was bringing surely nearer. Not that material dissolution alone, with which he was only too familiar; not death the scientific process, death the man-explained, the man-belittled; but death the teacher, death the guide, death the eternal mystery, at once the Alpha and the Omega of life.

The stillness of the room grew deeper. Mechanically, North had seated himself in the chair beside the bed. He sat there motionless, almost, as the figure which he watched. The solemn shadow of that which was to come crept from the face upon the pillow, and rested on the face that watched it. In the moments when the veil of life wears thin, and that which is behind stirs, dimly seen and faintly apprehended, the spirit of man humbles itself and questions not.

She was going; as surely and as visibly, as though he had seen her bodily form fading into nothingness before his eyes, she was passing away. The severance which no efforts of their own could have accomplished was drawing nearer and nearer; the severance of two existences condemned to crush each other, and in the process doomed to crush themselves. She was going. The riddle of the blind, rebellious, conquered life was to be solved at last; but the solution was for her and not for him. She was going.

The night had passed away. The dawn was stealing slowly into the room when North rose suddenly. For a moment he stood beside the bed, his eyes, deep and intense, fixed upon the face on the pillow. It was touched now, for the first time, by a slight suggestion of change. Still without moving his eyes he stretched out his hand and laid his fingers on her wrist. The beat of her pulse had altered. He felt a slight vibration as of movement shiver through her, and then the dead insensibility of her face slowly relaxed. Her eyes opened and looked full into his.

The wings of death beat through the air of life, and the vibrations thus called into being thrill through man with an influence which he may not fathom. In that supreme moment, as the eyes of the mother and son met, the tie between them rose, asserting itself in all its power for the first time, as for the last. It looked through the faint cloud of old antipathy in the dull eyes of the dying woman; and it responded solemnly in the eyes of the man who leaned over her. No thought of the daughter she had loved stirred in her; no thought of the sister who should have stood beside him penetrated his consciousness.

"Lift me up!"

Her breath was coming in long, painful gasps, and even as he raised her in his arms a grey pall fell between spirit and spirit as the strong woman's frame made its last struggle for life. She was conscious

still, but only dimly. He saw her lips move, and he bent his head to catch the words they uttered.

"... never be altered! It can—never—be altered!"

Her face was changing with a dreadful rapidity. Solemn grey shadows had gathered about her mouth, and for a moment she lay in his arms, long shudders shaking her from head to foot. Then her indomitable spirit seemed to fight its way back once more through the disabilities that were thronging its course. Her eyes were open, and recognition struggled back into them as she stared up into his face.

"Is it—you?" she said. "I suppose—I ought to say—I——"

She had never asked for pardon in her life, and she did not do it in the moment of death. But on every line of her face—sullen and reluctant even then, but unmistakable—the word was stamped.

And, as North touched her forehead gently with his lips, mother and son parted.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE stress and strain of feeling must subside. The wave which carries man beyond the limits of his reason, the wave which sweeps him from the foothold of his human knowledge and bears him onward on the bosom of the illimitable and unfathomable ocean which flows about humanity, has but one moment of perfect flood; and then it must recede again and leave him stunned, perhaps, and breathless on the shore of life. If it has raised him to a vantage ground from which the ocean in its majesty is discerned a little clearer; if the remembrance of that measured rush and sweep of many waters lingers in his heart, a solemn music to which his work is henceforth timed; its work is done. Man's place is on the shore until the ocean take him to itself for ever; it is on the shore that his labour waits him.

Quietly and steadily, with no unnecessary words, North Branton gathered up the broken threads of his life and bound them into the one strand by which he could go onwards into the future—the strand of work. He stood alone. The one all dominating tie was broken, but its shadow laid upon his life a sentence of unchanging isolation. No individual hopes or fears, cares or responsibilities were left him. But, losing these, he had passed through the discipline of struggle and pain into touch with humanity itself. It is the eyes that

have looked pain in the face until the meaning of those inexorable lines have slowly shadowed itself forth before their straining gaze, that see below the surface in the struggling lives around them. It is the hands that have wrestled inch by inch and hour by hour with despair by which the burden, large or small, which weighs upon the hearts of all men here can be most gently and most pitifully lightened. Most gently, most pitifully, and most unconsciously. To the man who has read one sentence in the book of life, the years that follow are one unceasing struggle to spell out yet other words upon the page which he will some day understand in full perfection. The daily duties brought by life are the means by which the struggle carries itself on, unknown and unsuspected, in proportion as the nature of the man is deep and still.

North's life, in one sense, was over. It was a natural instinct that prompted him to begin the life that lay before him still in a new country. It was a natural impulse that prompted him to place the seal of material distance upon that infinitely deeper distance that lay between him and the woman whom he loved. So that he had work, it mattered not at all to him where that work lay. He heard of a life appointment vacant in India; applied for, and obtained it.

The love that fears to suffer, the love that says, "We will not meet again, we cannot bear the pain!" is but a faint shadow of the love that says, "We will part. We will loose each other's hands bravely, knowing that in that last touch we have gained strength to live!"

That he and Eve Karslake must meet once again was a thought that lay deep and inarticulate in North's heart. But the word which brought them face to face came not from him, but from her. She wrote to him. She knew that he was going, she said, and would he come to her before he went?

It was a cold June afternoon, a week before he sailed, when they stood together for the last time. They met very quietly, talked, as people will when there is that passing within before which speech must fail, of surface matters, of his appointment, of his voyage, of her plans for the coming winter; their voices rising and falling with level monotony, their faces very still. Then there came a pause. It was broken by Lady Karslake, and as she spoke her voice caught a little for the first time.

"Did you ever know," she said, "that I went to see her?"

There was no need of any name. North Branston started slightly and looked at her.

"No," he said.

She told him in a few brief words of her visit to Mrs. Vallotson, and then there was another pause. And in the pause North rose silently. Lady Karslake rose also. Their faces were quite white now. The last moment was at hand, and they knew it. Then, quite suddenly, she spoke, her eyes fixed full upon him.

"You said life held a purpose," she said. "What did you mean? Our hearts are broken, and our lives are spoilt. You have been stronger always than I! If there is any meaning in the ghastly riddle of our existence, make me see it."

It was the supreme appeal of a soul long dormant struggling towards consciousness through agony and darkness; and the soul in North Branston rose to answer it.

"I cannot make you see it," he said steadily. "Life must do that."

"Life!" she said; there was a sharp note of anguish in her voice, but her eyes looked into his as though she read there more than his man's lips could utter. "What does life mean for us?"

"Just that," he answered gently. "Learn-
ing to understand."

"How?"

"By patience," he answered. "Patience with ourselves; patience with the lives about us; patience with the darkness which is the shadow cast by light."

Her breath was coming quickly and heavily, and for a moment she did not speak. The strained demand of her face had broken up, softened into a yearning, difficult perception. At last she moved. She stretched out both hands towards him.

"I am behind you!" she said. "A long, long way behind. For myself I only feel the darkness. But I see the light through you!"

TOURAINE IN AUTUMN.

SEPTEMBER is certainly the time to be in Touraine, whether you are "chasseur," interested in the vines, or merely the common sentimental tourist hungering for sights. It is a good thing to be a sportsman in France: the railway companies make special allowances to you, and you and your gun are regarded with some of

the admiration exacted by the military in this land so mindful of comparatively recent war troubles. One is disposed to think, after some acquaintance with the vast areas of vines here in the heart of France, that it is good also to be either a vineyard proprietor or a dealer in wines. And most assuredly the tourist will here find enough for him to do, what with castles on all sides of him, and the legends and histories that pertain to them, and the rich—if rather flat—landscapes between the Indre and the Loire. One is not ordinarily in academic mood when bent on holiday making; but it is further worthy of mention that they speak excellent French in this valley of the Loire. A well-bred native of Tours does not clip his syllables. The "Touraine mouth" is to the alien as precious as the "bocca Romana" in the Pope's city to the student of Italian.

The Tourainers themselves are comforting to behold: a stalwart, brown-faced people, with contentment deep set in them. The women in their blue cotton gowns, white mutches, and unwieldy wooden shoes, are picturesque enough for anything, if their dark sloe-like eyes and ready smiles be also taken into account. One sees fair faces among the younger girls: Madonna-like faces. It were easy to fancy that Agnes Sorel, "the fairest of the fair," resembled the best of them when she too was young and had not yet caught the eye of a King. As for the men, they are what one would expect them to be in such a natural garden: a hard-working class, prone to rejoice in all the festive leisure they can obtain. They love their native province passionately; it is difficult to realise what they must have felt when a quarter of a century ago the Prussian soldiers trod their fields and vineyards under foot and burned their homesteads. "I do not believe," said one of them to me the other day, "there can be any other country in the world better to live in than Touraine. We have so much sun even in winter. The climate is so mild, and all things grow in it." He spoke at a venture, having never been out of Touraine, and he did not desire to see if actual experience outside his own province might not abate his enthusiasm about the land of abbays, and castles, and good grapes.

Tours, the capital, is in keeping with the district that looks up to it. There is nothing meretricious about it. In some respects, it is distinctly an old-fashioned place. It is not, for instance, lit by electricity, and, though well frequented by

visitors, it has kept free from the cosmopolitan tone that tourist resorts as a rule acquire. Its sixty thousand inhabitants are not slaves to time. It is nothing to them that the city clocks seem to have an inveterate dislike to run in concord. This weakness is, however, carried rather far; even the station clocks differ, so that in going from one to the other you may chance to incur the fate of the man between two stools—both insecure. As one would suppose in a place so hallowed by ecclesiastical tradition, Tours is more religious than most French towns of its size. The deep bell of the Cathedral of St. Martin booms solemnly over the acres of dull red roofs below its belfry, the plane-trees and elms which are still—as when our Evelyn visited the place and declared that “no city in France exceeds it in beauty and delight”—the pride of Tours, and the broad silver ribbon of the Loire, with its stately bridges and sandy islets. Side by side with shops for the sale of the most modern of French novels are shops in which crucifixes, gay prints of saints, and devotional books seem offered with more confidence than the fiction in the other windows.

A market day in the city is well worth experiencing. The villagers from contiguous parts come into Tours in quaint, lumbering old wooden wains and alight in the back streets, which still preserve certain of their mediæval qualities. Then how they talk, to be sure! Our own countryfolk are prodigies in this respect on the like occasions; but they do not equal the Tourainers with baskets of eggs and couples of fowls to sell. Yet not at Tours, as elsewhere in the old cities of France, does the grand old cathedral of the place look down upon a parti-coloured host of buyers and vendors. The market squares are remote from its chiselled towers and the myriad of statuettes which adorn its superb façade.

Scenically, matters might be much more sensational than they are in this district drained by the Loire. Here and there long ridges of reddish or whitish soil break from the level land, with desirable slopes for the vines, and abrupt falls where they approach the river's banks. The feudal lords—English for the most part, in those days—of half-a-dozen centuries ago marked the value of such building sites. And still, as then, the gloomy donjons and the scarcely less sombre conical towers of their castles stand forth strongly against the blue sky

From some points several may be seen at once, their turrets and spires like sheaves of masonry. Everywhere they are suggestive; from Chaumont—where Henry the Second and Thomas à Becket met in 1170 for the last time—to Loches, whence in the ninth century the Plantagenets issued to a world destined subsequently to know them by heart. No buildings in France are more redolent of the vigorous, high-handed doings of bygone days, from fighting and sieges to courtly intrigues, brawls and worse in the name of religion, cowardly bloodshedding, and the love that Kings bear their Queens and the most beautiful of their subjects.

But the district is not all vineyards and castles and riverside meadows. There are tracts of forest in Touraine, though the Briton at large in the province may be tempted to scoff at a Frenchman's idea of forest trees. Between Chenonceaux—that gem of Touraine's castles, now occupied by a rich West Indian—and Amboise—whose iron gratings the Guises once strung with human corpses—there is for example a charming wood, with a white road climbing to it in easy terraces, and showing gay green vistas on either hand, where the forest tracks go endlessly east and west. It is a lonely enough road nowadays, though in the sixteenth century France's monarchs used it as much as any in the land. Diana of Poitiers also gave it a certain amount of notoriety in her movements from one to another of the castles which were the reward of her beauty. If one meets a frantic cyclist or a country cart in a mile on it in the present day, one does pretty well. For the most part, it seems reconsecrated to the natural solitudes which were first disturbed three or four centuries ago.

The glades of this forest are of themselves sufficient to convince the unprejudiced Englishman that we at home have not the monopoly of sylvan graces. The trees here are large, for France, and the undergrowth is thick. From the forest's depths blue jays flit across the white road, with its kilometre and tenth of a kilometre posts, and the raucous cry of many a pheasant proves that the omnipresent notice forbidding the stranger to “chase” has justification. It is excellent to make this walk in the evening of a hot September day, when the scent of oak bark comes forth vigorously with the first token of the dew, and the sun glows like a ball of fire at the end of the western rifts in the forest, which seem carved out expressly to do it honour.

The forest clothes one of Touraine's many ridges. With the descent to the north, corresponding to the ascent from Chenonceaux, Amboise's graceful, cathedral-like pile appears in the distance, flanked by its older feudal towers and the huge walls which have so significant a meaning. Soon the forest is left behind, and again we are in the midst of vines, whose purple and pale sea-green grapes are provocative of sinful longing. They are a generous people, however, these Tourainers. Do but hint to a cottager that you envy him his flowers, or admire his grapes, and he will fill your hands with roses and set himself to seek a cluster of fruit to show that he appreciates the compliment of your admiration. The peach-trees here are but another of Touraine's particularly good, and toothsome, points. Peaches at three halfpence a pound will seem an attractive lure, but you cannot know how attractive until you have feasted on this fine fruit, matured, like the Tourainers themselves, in the open air, face to face with the sun. Down in Amboise, under the shadow of the great castle, one marks how thrifty they are in the exploitation of their tiny garden patches. A yard but three or four metres square is made to rear vines that not only yield a delightful trellis work arbour beneath which to sit in the dog-days, but grapes almost plentiful enough for pressing. The blacksmith may if he pleases make a wine and label it with his name; and his neighbour the roadmender may do likewise, and run the blacksmith hard in that race for distinguished labels which is such a feature of competitive existence among French wine-growers.

One must come to Touraine also to understand something about that noble river, the Loire. What a breadth it has even here, scores of miles from its mouth: with islands and sandy shoals and countless bridges to dignify it! And how patiently it provides sport for the great army of French anglers, who like nothing better than to sit on a grassy knoll dangling a worm in the water, protected from the sun by a large green or white umbrella! The dear enthusiasts do not seem to mind much about the tastes of the fish they catch, so they can catch them. They may be seen at Blois and Tours angling industriously in the soap-suds between the civic laundries and the shore, undisturbed in spirit by the tumultuous clatter of the bare-armed matrons and maids who lean over the sides of the anchored barges, and thump

the linen with an energy that argues them no weaklings. There is something quite ludicrous about a Touraine angler's joy in a big fish. Three mornings in succession we discovered a crowd of these enthusiasts leaning over a bridge, staring at and apostrophising a certain graceful "barbillon" which whisked its tail in defiance of all fish-hooks. One blue-smocked old fellow was in the same bent attitude on each occasion. "Un beau morceau, monsieur!" he exclaimed elatedly to every new-comer, and he proceeded to tell almost tearfully of the impossibility of tempting this "fine morsel"—a good eighteen inches in length!—into the initial step towards the frying-pan.

September, however, is not a flood month. One sees then vast reaches of bared, pale pink sand in the Loire's very midst. But it is easy to imagine how its majesty is trebled after a stormy and wet week or two. By Marmoutier, for instance, where once stood an abbey of far fame, now in charming neglected ruin, you may see inscriptions which tell of the floods of 1846 and 1856, when the river far overswept its banks, and turned this vine-draped ruin and its adjacent inhabited houses into an island. There are tourists who canoe down the Loire to Nantes. This must be a memorable excursion, and at no time better than when the grapes are ripe—and settled sunshine is expected—may it be planned and put into enjoyable execution.

A different kind of river altogether is the Indre, which meanders placidly by Loches. It is not very wide, it is a clouded green in colour, and it bears patches of water-lilies on its smooth surface. It passes many a quiet village with ancient church spires and dilapidated castle relics. Its meadows blush with crocuses, and it provides idyllic pleasure for those who have boats to row on it, and amiable lady friends to accompany them. You may see several such parties during a two or three hours' stroll along its green banks, even where there are few signs of local population. The slim poplars whisper over them as if they were in sympathy with them; and there are plenty of inlets with green bowers to retreat into from the noontide sun, and to provide romance with its most winsome opportunities.

Yet when all's said, Touraine in September pays little heed to its rivers and castles, and even the visitors who come with money in their pockets and circular tickets for the round of its palaces. The

grape harvest is, in fact, about to begin. Will the weather hold good, as it ought, for this all-important function? This is the question of all questions now. Hailstorms, such as occasionally mark April or May in letters of red ruin, cannot be expected; but there may be a tropical downpour or two which shall bruise or even burst the teeming grapes by the million. Every one rejoices in the prospect of a successful vintage, but there is no knowing if hope may not be flouted. Certainly, if one may judge from the clusters at the various tables d'hôte and the offerings of freeholders, Touraine has no cause for anxiety in this particular season of 1894: some of its clusters would do credit to a hothouse. Yet the unforeseen does so often happen, and it is as well not to be too sanguine, even though the sunsets every night are as auspicious as possible.

After a few days in Touraine one comes to realise that though its noble castles are much—indeed, very much—with their façades and portals so exquisitely

Carved with figures strange and sweet,
All made out of the carver's brain,

though they are much, the grapes are more. Touraine was formerly ruled, often tyrannically, by its castles. It now lives benignly by its vineyards.

HEALTH.

THERE are two things which are, perhaps, to be desired above all others—money and health. Which is the more desirable of the two is not easily determined. For, while it certainly is true that money can buy health, it is also equally true that there is health which not all the wealth in the world can purchase. And, again, while even millions are of no account without health, perfect health has all it requires though confronted by a scarcity of pence. It is true that, just as the moneyed man tells you that the thing he needs is health, so the healthy man cries out for cash. But in health, as in sickness, there are degrees. A man may be healthy in the positive degree, and have many wants; it is doubtful if he who is healthy in the superlative degree wants anything. For consider what perfect health is.

It has been said that no one can be morally healthy who is not physically so. In a certain sense this is a plain statement of a plain fact. Health is a matter of equipoise; of a whole, the several parts of

which must be equally balanced. If one part is heavier, or lighter, than the others, then the whole is unbalanced, and therefore flawed. It is obvious, if we reflect, that moral qualities cannot safely be developed at the expense of physical ones. A physical wreck may be a moral saint, but, the more closely one studies history, the more one suspects that it is precisely saints of that sort who have given birth to a preponderating proportion of the immorality with which the world is troubled. On the other hand, a person in the enjoyment of perfect physical health must be sound upon the moral side, because perfect physical health necessitates perfect balance, and perfect balance is an equation of sanity. Immorality is a want of sanity. An absolutely sane person will only do sane things, and, immorality being insanity, only moral—i.e., sane—actions will come within the compass of his methods.

Looseness of speech is a peculiarity of our common conversation, as, for instance, when we say that "so-and-so is in good health, and always has been, yet look at the crimes he has committed!" We, many of us, do not stop to think what good health really is; are content with a superficial appearance; do not stop to probe into details. A physiologist, whose business it is to be accurate, will almost certainly tell us that so-and-so is not a healthy man; that in something which makes for health he is wanting.

It may seem startling to assert that a healthy man can hardly be an immoral one, and for this reason: because, while the sound body is the affair of nature, which never varies, morals are the playthings of man, who changes with every wind that blows. The standard of physical health, from the point of view of nature, must always have been the same, in all the countries of the world; the standard of morality, on the other hand, is not only different in different places, but, in each place, it is always altering. Thus, because the natural man has natural instincts, those moralists who have constructed for themselves an unnatural code, tell us that he is depraved—oblivious of the fact that it is in themselves that the depravity exists. The pother which fills the air, causing men and women to exhibit their folly in vain contentions about vice and virtue, is merely a symptom of physical ill-health. The age is an unhealthy one; were it not so, there would be no such pother. In an unhealthy host, the healthy unit is not likely to be a

popular one; the exhibition of his robust constitution seems to be a reflection on the frailties of his fellows; they resent it, and, in their unhealthy fashion, do their best to leave on him the marks of their resentment.

The sound mind in the sound body is not prudish. It is an illustration of the degree of unsoundness to which we have attained, to state that such is our present-day prudery that it is difficult, in a journal intended for popular reading, to state precisely what perfect physical health actually means and is. Certainly there is not in Great Britain to-day an individual who may be described as being in the possession of the ideally perfect physical health. One might go further and say that there never has been such a one in all the earth.

It is, sometimes, remarked that the nearest approach to perfect health which is discoverable in the world to-day, is found among savages. But this may be doubted. Possibly certain savages, like certain animals, have so habituated themselves to the conditions of their existence that they can endure them better than any one else. But to admit that is to admit little. There are some fine men among the Zulus, men of inches, of steel, who never know what it is to suffer a day's ill-health between the cradle and the grave—so long as they remain in Zululand, living the lives to which they have been born. Transplant them to London, require them to live the lives of British workmen, their health would vanish like snow in summer. Take the workman to Zululand, constrain him to live the Zulu life, you would find that he would flourish much better in the Zulu's place, than the Zulu would in his. You say that that is because the workman would be reverting to natural conditions, while the Zulu would be making his first acquaintance with the unnatural? That is not the only reason, nor, indeed, is it the chief one. The workman is an example of the survival of the fittest. He is the fruit of a long line of ancestors who have, at various periods, been accustomed to all sorts of conditions. Place him where you will, the chances are at least equal that he will thrive there just as well as he would at home. The Zulu is the representative of progenitors who have known only one set of conditions. Those have remained unchanged from sire to sire. Until now they have become the creatures of those conditions, so that, when those pass, they themselves must cease to be.

It is difficult to describe what health,

even in the positive degree, is; it is easier to say what it is not. It is not, necessarily, strength. The popular notion that an athlete, because of his athleticism, is a healthy man, is a delusive one. Muscular developement is not an affair of the constitution, it is an accident. Strong limbs and a weak heart are, not infrequently, associates. Many a "strong man" dies, prematurely, of consumption. If health may be defined as a capacity for holding on to life, then, in many cases, the weaklings are the healthiest. If such a definition is accurate, women are healthier than men; their average length of days is greater than ours. But it is doubtful if centenarians, merely because they are centenarians, are the healthiest. I knew a case of a woman, who recently died at the age of a hundred and five, who was slightly paralysed even as a child, and who was, practically, completely so for more than seventy years. Could such a one have ever been correctly described as healthy? It is as hard to say what life is as to say what health is, and the way in which unhealthy folks are tenacious of life is not the least of the marvels.

Health, as common conversation understands it, is not, as a matter of course, a condition of length of days. We say, and so far as medical knowledge goes, we know, that A has a good constitution, that B has a bad one. They live the same lives, walk the same paths, and even, if you will, think the same thoughts. Yet, suddenly, A ceases to exist, while B still is. Of all mysteries, the something which we call life is the most mysterious. The more we pretend to know of it, the more we expose our ignorance. We know not why it is, nor where it is, nor how it is. We are wholly at a loss to adequately explain why, or where, or how it continues in the frame of the paralytic, while from the body of the man with a sound constitution it passes, as it seems to us, prematurely away.

Health, some one has said, is freedom from pain. There is something in that. The man with a toothache, while it lasts, can scarcely be a healthy man. The severer the toothache, the less his health. If your finger hurts you, to the extent it hurts you you have lost your health. On the other hand, it is by no means certain that a man is healthy because he is free from pain. He may think that he is, and we are constantly being told that if a man thinks he is well, he is well. This position, while, in one sense, nonsense, in another approaches

very near to wisdom. There is an inexplicable connection between faith and health, and the sick man who persuades himself that he has health is likely to be nearer it than the healthy man who persuades himself that he is sick. Still, because a man is free from pain, and therefore thinks that all, physically, is right with him, it, unfortunately, does not necessarily follow that it is—as many such a one has learnt when he has endeavoured to effect an insurance on his life. We may be without the semblance of ache or pain, in the best of spirits, full of faith in the good which the years shall bring us, and yet already sick unto death of the disease which, perhaps in another minute, will cause us to be numbered with the great majority.

What is colloquially understood by health is sufficiently comprehensible. We say, "We envy Smith his good health; he has never had a doctor in his life." What is meant is, that Smith is a man who possesses a fairly decent temper; who seldom, or never, is conscious of physical suffering; and who, so far as we are able to judge, passes over both the rough and the smooth places with a smiling face. By many of us, such a one is to be envied. He is, probably, blessed with a good digestion—which is about as desirable a possession as a man can have. Possibly some three-fourths of the ills which afflict mankind have a more or less remote connection with the digestive organs. He who can, within fairly reasonable limits, eat and drink what he pleases; who can adapt himself to the requirements of modern life without inconvenience; who can sleep at will, and rise refreshed; who never knows those dark hours which are the bane of the dyspeptic; that man is the owner of a treasure, the full value of which he will not know till he has lost it. If Smith has a good digestion, that one thing approximates him very closely to the up-to-date ideal of a healthy man.

A man with a good digestion ought to be a hero; it is very difficult indeed to be heroic if you have a bad one. Valour has more to do with the stomach than the poets allow. He can scarcely be bad-tempered; if he is, he will not have his priceless treasure long. He ought to be an optimist; was ever a pessimist who had not some acquaintance with indigestion? If ever the competitive system becomes universal, and rulers of states are chosen by examining boards, that a candidate must have a good digestion should be held to be a "sine qua

non." Incalculable mischief has been wrought by monarchs who have experienced stomachic troubles. Single-minded justice and rigid impartiality can be expected from no man who is worried by his liver.

Although the aforementioned Smith may be very far indeed from being an absolutely healthy man, still we are justified in wishing that more were like him. To such a state of things have we come that it is only a minority of those persons who have attained to riper years, who have as much cause to congratulate themselves on their physical condition as he has. The duration of life, it may be, is as considerable as it has ever been, but life is not everything, and the existence which is dragged on in continual association with drugs and doctors is one which, "per se," is barely worth the having. There are some rare spirits who, Mark Tapley fashion, rising superior to their surroundings, racked by bodily afflictions, still have a gay heart, and move bravely to the grave. But when one does meet such, one is inclined to ask oneself if they would not have played a finer and a more effective part on this mortal stage if they had had a more considerable acquaintance with physical ease.

The average invalid is a hopeless and a helpless being, a burden to himself and others. It is a hard, but an actual truth, that ill-health is, as a rule, a synonym for selfishness. The thing is natural enough. Though we may be slow at confession, we are all self-centred. We are all of us, to ourselves, the most important items the world contains. If our horizon is bounded by a chamber of sickness, we are apt to insist, so far as insistence is in our power, that the horizon of all with whom we come into contact should have the same boundary as our own. More, the chronic invalid is not seldom disposed to resent, almost as if it were an offence towards himself, better health in another. After all, the point of view is to be excused, we being mortal. What we have not ourselves, we are not anxious that others should have. We have only one life to live; what does not come into our life does not come near us at all. It passes by on the other side. It is not in touch with us, nor we with it. Strive as we may to achieve concealment, we never can utterly destroy a feeling of antagonism towards that which, much to be desired though it is, we know never can be ours.

Medicine—the reiteration is always either before our eyes or in our ears—has made gigantic forward strides. It may have done,

and yet one wonders. Sanitary science has revolutionised society; and yet folks die just as they ever did, and suffer quite in the good old fashion before death comes. The surgeon may perform an operation with a skill and a courage which, to his predecessor of a hundred years ago, would have seemed miraculous, but the physician can do little more for us than he ever could. We frequently hear of new and startling discoveries in medicine, but, for all practical purposes, they come stillborn from their discoverers. Small-pox decreases, and the doctors point their fingers and say, "See what we have done for you." Influenza, pneumonia, or the latest fashionable novelty in complaints, comes instead. Which is the better, let the doctors decide.

The continual contest which is carried on against the devastations of disease has its comic side. There are the hosts of widely advertised nostrums which are guaranteed to cure all human ills; and the more the ills are cured, the more the hosts increase. There are the legions of professional gentlemen who are above and before all things sticklers for etiquette; who warn us against empirical pretenders; who assure us that Allopath is our friend, not Homœopath; who earnestly entreat us not to pay our money to any one who is not legally authorised to notify the registrar that we indeed are dead. And yet is there one of us who does not know that, in spite of the whole queer army, when his hour comes he will die?

There are services which a physician, as apart from a surgeon, can render us; but the longer one lives, and the more one moves about the world, the more one begins to suspect that these are services which any one, with common sense and a fair amount of experience—i.e., empiricism—could perform for us. Professor Huxley proposed some time ago that there should be a test of the power of prayer. Doctors and scientific men generally, so they tell us, are fond of demonstrations. Would it not be an interesting and instructive experiment if there were a test of the power of doctors? Take, haphazard, a number of people of both sexes and of all ages. Divide them into communities. Let the doctors of each nation have a community to themselves—this division would be indispensable because the difference which exists between the treatment prescribed, say, by a French and by an English doctor has to be experienced to be believed. Let the allopathists, the homœopaths, the hydropathists, the thousand-

and-one sets of medical faddists, all have a community of their own. Give the nostrum mongers free hands. Suffer the faith healers to work, unimpeded, somewhere, their own sweet will. And, amidst the whole number of the communities, permit one to be set apart in which no doctor of any sort or kind—regular or irregular—shall be allowed to place a foot or to have a voice. If such a test were feasible, I wonder what the result would be. Or rather, I do not wonder; I should like to have a wager depending on the issue. I would wag-r that, all things being equal—position, climate, circumstances, constitution, ages—the physical history of all those communities would be pretty well of a muchness. They would all suffer from the same diseases; would beat them, or be beaten by them, in much the same way; and would die at about the same age. Of this I am certain—and in this I believe that the physicians themselves would be upon my side—that the medically supervised communities would be every whit as closely acquainted with pain, disease, and suffering before the curtain finally fell as that one community in which no doctors were.

And yet it would be rash to say that, in the struggle for health, the doctors are of no assistance. "Every Englishman who is born alive"—is it not something like this that Mr. Gilbert sings?—"is born a little Liberal or Conservative." Some of us are born to go to church and some to go to chapel. Nearly all of us are brought into the world to lean on doctors. They usher us on to the scene; they usher us off it; between the rising and the falling of the curtain they walk perpetually by us, observing us with watchful—one would not wish to write with hungry—eyes. It is singular with what facility many people become the creatures of habit. They go to church because their fathers always went, and they themselves have always been, but without having any real knowledge of the why and the wherefore, though if they did not go they would be conscience-stricken and unhappy. In the same way, and for similar reasons, when a case of sickness occurs, they call in the doctor; they themselves not knowing why—save that it is their habit so to do—but taking it for granted that he does, while the doctor—adequately to bear his part in the comedy—does his best to prevent their guessing that he does not. If it is a case of cure, he assumes the credit to himself; if it is a case of kill, why, that is the visitation of God.

Still, on such occasions, the doctor is of assistance now and then, and in this way—he is a “comfort.” “It’s such a comfort to think,” we are told, “that the doctor came at once; that he was in and out of the house half-a-dozen times a day; that he was here when the poor dear died.” Strangely enough, these people mean precisely what they say. It is true that the treatment did not do the patient an atom of good, but, from their point of view, it is a comfort to think that he did have the best advice. Their fathers always had the best advice; they have always had the best advice; they will take care that every one connected with them always does have the best advice. In fact, to have sickness in the house and not to have the best advice is indecent; almost as bad as not going to a “place of worship” on a Sunday. To these sort of people doctors are of assistance. As they very correctly say, they cannot do without them. But, so long as it is the kind of article to which they are accustomed, or which is in the fashion, it is a matter of indifference whether the representative of medicine has his credentials from the College of Physicians or from the College of Quacks. The betting is about even that in either case the result will be the same.

No doctor can give us health. No doubt, if a man has injured his constitution by excesses, a doctor can tell him that, if he discontinues those excesses, his constitution may be restored to him; but it does not need a doctor to tell him that, though numbers of people who find themselves in such a plight seem to think it does. If you have injured yourself by overwork, or by overdrinking, or by overeating, or by putting an undue strain on your physical powers of any sort or kind, you do not need a doctor, if the injury has not gone too far; if it has, not all the doctors in the world can help you. If you live a healthy and a natural life, and exercise your own common sense, you need never call in a doctor during the whole course of your existence; if you do not, a multitude of doctors will make no difference. If, from any cause whatever, you have entirely lost your health, no doctor will be able to give it back to you; just as if you never had good health, no doctor will be able to give you what you never had.

“Give us”—we shall do no harm by playing echo to Solomon—“neither poverty nor riches, but——” we shall do well to add, by way of a rider of our own, “give us health.” Health, even, in the positive

degree. It is a gift which must be bestowed on us by nature; else not all the wisdom of the schools can give it us, nor by taking thought can we obtain it for ourselves. Since it is a moot question if health is not a synonym for happiness, it is obvious that it is a thing worth having. Yet it is a precarious possession. Whether, conjoined with brains, it is likely to endure longer is not so certain. The clever man is apt to destroy his constitution quickly; the ploughman, whose strength is not in his wits, preserves his to the end. With an impaired constitution the faculty of enjoyment diminishes, until it altogether disappears. Why one continues to live when one is no longer able to enjoy, one can but wonder. It is certain that if those who have lost the capacity for enjoyment were to die to-morrow, the earth would be scantily peopled.

The sky is only blue to us while we have good health. It is only then that the light of the sun is pleasant, and nature smiles. It is only then that we are able to find delight in the varying traffic of the hour, in the phantasmagoria of the passing show. We are pleased by trifles in our vigorous days, there is magic in a woman’s eyes. Our spirits rise at least as quickly as they fall, we are swift to see the silver lining to the clouds. We realise that, indeed, the sun is always shining somewhere in the world; and if it is not quite where we are standing, why, it will be soon. The days are short, the nights not long; if now is winter, to-morrow brings us roses, and then what a sweet rapture is in the roses’ smell. How much is in the world worth doing, and some of the doing surely will be ours! There is nothing we encounter which does not contain within itself possibilities for brightening, at the very smallest estimate, the moments which are flying. The fruits of the earth, how good they are; and how pleasant a thing it is to eat when one is hungry; and what strange tales people tell about the foods which disagree with them, and which they dare not touch! Why, there is nothing which the cook can place upon the table of which we have any fear while we have health.

But with the advent of ill-health, a more sombre note comes in the voices. The sun shines more seldom then; sometimes we wonder if it ever shines at all, anywhere; and when it does shine, what we notice chiefly is, that it is trying to the eyes, and how it wearies one. How slowly the time does pass! And yet when one

looks back at the days which are gone, how little one did in them. But then, what is there after all that is worth the doing? Or what does it matter what one does? All things, sentient or otherwise, move towards oblivion. We are but the corks on the stream; of what consequence is it what course we steer? For all of us alike there is the cataract at the end. As for the so-called joys of life, they are but the tinsel on the puppets. Women are snares, and men are false; while to speak of the pleasures of the palate is to talk rank folly. It is with pains of the stomach we are better acquainted—when our health is gone.

So, Nature—Universal Mother!—give us health, and in giving it give us also the faculty of keeping it. Knit it strongly into our being. Gird us with it round about. So make it part and parcel of ourselves, that being life's co-equal, it shall not quit us till death comes. Number us among those whom thou hast blessed; suffer us to continue hale and hearty until we return to thee.

Is there a petition which man can fashion the granting of which is much more to be desired than that?

OUR FIRST CASE.

A COMPLETE STORY.

WE were sitting in our little room, looking at each other. A week or two ago we had set up independently. We had come here to make our fortunes, but private nurses did not seem to be in much request in this benighted place. All the doctors knew of us, and had welcomed us cordially. With one consent they had said that we were just what was wanted here.

"Do you think we can afford to stay another week?" asked Kathleen.

"Perhaps, one more," I answered.

"It's a most interesting experience," she said.

"And will end in quite an exciting finale," I added. "The worst of it is the return home amidst the jeers of our friends, who are expecting us any day."

Kathleen shuddered.

"We may get a case in the next few days," I said; "such things occasionally happen."

"Give me another cup of tea, Agnes," cried Kathleen; "it is ruinous to the nerves, but I must have it. If any of my patients drank half so much as I do, I should read them a lecture they would not forget, but——"

Our landlady flung open the door, and Dr. Puckle burst in upon us.

"Ah! I was so afraid I should find you out," he cried. He was Irish.

"We happen to have a holiday," said Kathleen. "At least, we have no very urgent case on this morning."

"Allow me to give you a cup of tea," said I.

"Tea? Tea at this time of day!" He shook his head at us. "I should have thought you knew better, nurse. Never drink tea at eleven o'clock. No sugar, thank you."

He settled himself comfortably before the fire, and sipped his tea, while delivering himself of a long and strong dissertation on the evil of this habit. Kathleen and I corroborated every word he said.

"Well, now to business," cried Dr. Puckle. "I came to ask you to undertake a case, a very painful case. It's old Josiah Hartland. Ever heard of him?"

"No," I answered.

"That man would have been dead a year ago if he hadn't happened to—ah—live. This time he'll go. Meanwhile I must get a couple of nurses for him, by hook or by crook. Will you undertake his case?"

"Tell us some more about him, doctor."

"He lives in Hartland's Hollow. I suppose you know that part?"

"No," said Kathleen, and Dr. Puckle looked relieved.

"It's a trifle lonely, but I suppose you don't mind that?"

"Not in the least," said I. "We are neither of us troubled with nerves—in spite of the tea."

"You'll find no one there but the coachman and his wife, an old couple. You'll have to do everything yourselves, I'm afraid. When can you be ready? The case is urgent."

We promised to go that afternoon, and, when Dr. Puckle left us, Kathleen and I held a little celebration in honour of our first case.

We found ourselves before a low, rambling building at four o'clock that afternoon. The walls were thickly covered with ivy and creepers; tall trees surrounded it, which lent an air of mystery to the place. A solemn hush was on it, and the chilly afternoon fog was rising.

"I hope there's a good fire," whispered Kathleen, shivering.

The sound of the bell was muffled, and seemed to come from underground regions. We had to ring three times before any one

thought of answering our summons. Then the door was opened suspiciously, and an old woman peered at us out of her spectacles.

"Oh—be you the nusses?" she mumbled. "You may come in."

"How kind!" said Kathleen in my ear; "don't you feel gratified, Agnes, by this gracious permission!"

She waited till our traps were deposited in the hall, then shut and locked the door.

"One never knows what may happen," she murmured, speaking to herself. Her candle cast suspicious shadows round the low, dark hall. We could smell the dust of ages as we followed the housekeeper upstairs. She told us, in passing, the different rooms, and informed us that some of them were haunted, but she didn't rightly know which.

"What a delightful house!" said Kathleen, aloud, and her voice echoed far away and disturbed the brooding silence. I wanted to hush her, for I kept feeling as if I were at church. "So cheerful!" rang out her voice.

"That's your room," said our guide, stopping at the top of the stairs to breathe, "and that's the master's." With that she turned and went into the dark regions we had left behind, and we found ourselves standing in a passage lighted by a single small lamp, with our bags in our hands and our hearts beating rather rapidly.

"I thought there must be something queer about it," said Kathleen, "Dr. Puckle was so very reserved."

"It is charming," I affirmed. "Now, shall we introduce ourselves to our patient or to our room?"

"Our room first," said Kathleen; "let us keep the best treat till the end."

It was not an ideal room which had been prepared for us, nor overclean, but, as Kathleen said, we were both able to scrub a floor after our hospital training. She threw open the window, lighted both the candles on the dressing-table, and then declared that it was fit for the Queen.

"But horribly cold," I supplemented.

"Well, my dear, wait till it's aired before you shut the window. When that old hag's lighted our fire it won't be half bad."

"It strikes me," said I, "that we may as well light it ourselves, if we want one at all."

"There seems a superabundance of insects and crawling things," said Kathleen, examining the corners of the room. "I'm rather fond of spiders. Are you?"

"On the whole," I answered, "I prefer my bedroom free of them."

"That is a pity," said Kathleen.

"Let us now go and make the acquaintance of our patient," I suggested.

Our gentle knock was not answered, so we went in unbidden.

Josiah Hartland was lying in bed breathing heavily. He was an old man. His skin was as yellow as a London fog, his eyes were so sunken under shaggy brows that at first sight he seemed to have none. The room was comfortless in the extreme. The fire was nearly out, and an untrimmed lamp smoked upon the table by his bed. He turned and stared at us.

"Two of you!" burst out a sharp, thin voice, startling us. "Two! I don't want two, one's quite enough. I'm not going to pay two to do the work of one."

"But one of us has to sit up with you at night," said I, in a cheerful, soothing tone.

"What do you want with sleep?" he growled; "a great, strapping girl like you ought to be able to do without it. Has James come in?"

"Who is James?"

"James, he's my coachman, of course. Who else did you think he was? Ring the bell, can't you? I tell you I want James to come up. He's been collecting my rents; I want to see him about them."

"It's rather late in the day to be doing business," said Kathleen.

He turned and stared at her.

"Who's that?" he asked, pointing at her with a bony finger.

"She is your other nurse," said I.

"Send her away, then. One's quite enough. I'm not going to pay two nurses, I tell you. I engaged you, but I never engaged her. Send her away!"

"Just now," I answered, "I am going away, and your second nurse will stay with you. I shall sit up with you to-night, so I am going to rest now."

Kathleen followed me to the door, looking slightly scared.

"I wish you joy, dear," said I. "We have a delightful case for our first!"

When I awoke from my nap, I found Kathleen by the fire in our room, and a nice little meal waiting for me.

"Don't thank Mrs. Jones for that," said she, "or expect to find such things growing in this house. If you are hungry, you must go and forage about in the larder for something to eat; if you haven't got the genius which distinguishes everything I do, pro-

bably you won't find anything. At all events, partake freely now, for you have a long night before you."

She was very tired, and I left her to sleep as best she could in our spider-haunted room.

I was simply astonished at the change Kathleen had wrought in the sick-room. The only thing which seemed the same was our patient, and he looked cleaner. Kathleen afterwards told me that she had never found it so difficult to persuade any one to let her wash him.

"Has she gone?" asked Josiah.

"Yes, she's gone to bed," said I.

"Gone to bed! Whose bed? I won't have her sleeping in one of my beds."

"Yes, it's all right," I said, "and now you must let me settle you for the night."

"You aren't going to wash me!" he cried, "the other one has just done it."

"No, no, it's all right, I won't wash you again to-night."

When he had taken his medicine, and was settled comfortably, I sat by the fire in the darkened room, and strange thoughts came to me. How was it that my life had drifted into this? Five years ago I was a thoughtless girl, with scarcely a care beyond dress and pleasure and friendship. My friends thought it eccentric to "waste" my youth like this! They were amused, and could not see through my desire to do something useful in the world. However it was, here I found myself, a girl who had been shielded from all the roughness and trouble of life, in the very presence of suffering and death, playing an important part in the tragedy which I felt sure would end soon, for I knew the look of death so well that sometimes I saw it with scarcely a shudder. Our patient did not seem conscious of his condition. He lay there, in his large and lonely house, without one friend or relative beside him. It was a sad case for our first!

It grew more and more silent. An ash fell out of the grate, and it sounded as if a thunderbolt had burst. I jumped in my chair, and felt a thrill all down my back. Then I began to think of the lonely situation of the house, and the distance between the two old caretakers and me, if anything should happen. After a while the silence teemed with countless noises. I heard a long wail, a queer wailing—more like a human cry than the wind—a pitter-patter, a buzzing, a faint tapping, a sigh. And there was a long creeping thud every now and then.

I am not superstitious. I firmly believe that superstition is the result of ignorance, and that educated people ought to despise it. But—I began to feel as if perhaps there was more than I had thought in some of those superstitions. Surely they could not have lived through centuries if there had been no truth in them!

"Go and fetch me my rent-book."

I nearly screamed. His voice had come so suddenly upon my thoughts.

"D'ye hear!" cried the thin, high voice.

I tried to persuade him to lie down and go to sleep, but he grew so excited that to quiet him I was obliged to yield.

"Where is it?" I asked.

It was downstairs, in one of those horrib'e, deserted rooms.

"Wouldn't you rather wait till the morning?" I asked.

"No, fetch it now, now! Besides, then you can look round and see that there are no burglars about. They know I'm ill, and that I've got a great sum of money here. I'm only waiting till I get better to take it myself to the bank."

His voice grew wilder and wilder. He urged me on, and I went, for nothing else could quiet him. I took a lighted candle with me, and, as I found my way down the creaking stairs, my heart thumped against my side.

I am sure I heard a low growl at the foot of the stairs. As the flickering light of my candle moved onwards in the darkness, it seemed to disperse countless shadows that had dim shapes. I thought I saw the outline of a grinning head. Mrs. Jones had said some of these rooms were haunted—supposing this one was! Something scuttled away. I set my candle down, afraid I should drop it, my hand was trembling so. Something fell with a thud on the table, and that was too much for me. Snatching up my candle, I turned and fled. The candle went out, but the feeble flicker of the lamp upstairs guided me, and I stumbled on, not daring to take a breath till I found myself once more in the sick-room. I have since found out that the library was swarming with cockroaches and mice.

Old Josiah had fortunately fallen into a doze, so I settled myself in my chair again, having gently made up the fire. Would this awful night never pass? It was not two o'clock, and it seemed like the beginning of eternity.

Tick, tick, tick! What was that?

Tick, tick, tick!

I knew—it was the death-spider. I had

heard of the horrid thing before, and had not believed in its existence. But I had never before spent a night with a dying man, in a haunted house. I stole softly to the bedside, but he was sleeping nicely. He had several days to live still.

"Well, how did you get on? What sort of night had you?"

Kathleen was like a breeze, her voice swept off the vapours of the night.

"Beautifully," said I. "I have had a delightful night."

"When shall I get better?" asked our patient. "What's the good of paying a couple of nurses and a doctor if they can't cure me quicker than this? Why can't you speak, doctor? Answer me."

"Hartland, it is time to prepare yourself for another world; you cannot get better."

"I must, I must; I've a great sum of money in the house that ought to be banked. And James hasn't got in all the rents. He's a fool at it. Send him up to me at once."

Dr. Puckle told us that this perpetual worrying about his business was hastening the end. He said it could not be far distant now, and Kathleen and I determined to try and get the poor man to think of other things more appropriate at this solemn time.

"You cannot take your money with you," I said, "so why worry about it now? You are dying, Mr. Hartland; surely you can leave your money matters alone. What importance can they possibly be just now?"

"Much you know about business," sneered the old man. "Business is business, whether a man's dying or not." Then he burst out crying like a child. "All my life," he wailed, "all my life I've spent in getting it, and now I've got to leave it! It isn't fair. Send James up to me at once. I want to know whether he's made that villain Richards pay up. Why, the fellow owes two quarters! It's infamous."

I looked at Kathleen in despair.

It was always like that. Sometimes he cried and sobbed, sometimes he railed against the injustice of life; his one and only idea was still his money, that money which he had made himself, and which he loved with a concentrated passion. He looked at the cold, useless thing, and never missed the warm human faces that ought to have been round him now. He had no relations, no friends; his money had come between him and all the softer joys of life,

and in dying he cared for nothing except that he had to part with it.

Kathleen stared at the little heap of salt she had spilt.

"What's the matter, Kathleen?"

"Oh, nothing," she answered, starting. "Of course I don't believe in any such nonsense. But I saw a crow this morning—now I've spilt some salt."

"Throw a pinch over your left shoulder," I suggested, laughing at her.

"Goose," she retorted, "do you think I'm so silly?"

I stooped to pick up my serviette, and she made a rapid movement as though throwing something over her shoulder.

"Kathleen," I cried sharply, "put your knife and fork straight."

"Why? What's wrong with them?"

She looked at them, then suddenly snatched up the fork and laid it down beside the knife.

"I do believe you were frightened because they were crossed!" she said.

"Did you hear the screech-owl last night?" I asked.

"No, but I heard a dog howling, and when I got up to see the time, I saw a shooting star."

"Superstition is such nonsense," said I.

"Yes, isn't it?"

I was sitting by him, and in the darkened room I saw his bony hands groping about aimlessly, or picking at his sheet. When I had washed him, he had fretfully declared that we nurses did nothing in the world but wash him, and "the other one" had done it that very morning. I tried to persuade him that the morning had nothing to do with the evening, but he didn't see it. He was now muttering to himself, or lapsing into unconsciousness. He did not know me. His mind seemed to be wandering into the money-getting past, for I could hear snatches of calculations, and something about the Stock Exchange which I did not understand.

Then all was silence, but for the beating of my heart.

There came a tapping at my window. I sat up straight, clutching the arms of the chair. Death himself might have been knocking for admittance! I knew, I was sure that it was but a bird; but I had heard that when a sparrow taps at the window it means death. A few minutes after there sounded a loud crash downstairs, and I sprang up and rushed into our room,

having just presence of mind left to see that our patient had not been disturbed. Kathleen was sitting up in bed.

"Did you hear that noise?" I gasped.

"Ye—es," said she, through chattering teeth. "Do you think there's a burglar here?"

"Well, perhaps you'd better go and see," said I. "I would—but I cannot leave Mr. Hartland."

"Oh," said Kathleen, "I would—but I'm not dressed. What's the matter, Agnes?"

I took her shoes, which she had left on the table, by accident, and threw them down. She started.

"I—I tumbled upstairs yesterday, Agnes," she said, seizing my arm.

There was another crash. I had knocked over a hand-glass!

Next morning a large picture of Josiah Hartland was found on its face in the dining-room. Mrs. Jones said it had fallen several times before, for the cord was rotten and kept breaking; but Mr. Hartland wouldn't buy a new one. We said it had better not be hung again, as we did not like going down to see what was the matter in the middle of the night. She seemed surprised, and evidently wondered what we were here for.

I told Kathleen that she looked pale, and she said I looked ghastly. I asked her whether she thought we could endure another night of it, and she said she could not, but if I liked I might stay, and she would give me all the profits.

There was no need for us to stay.

Mr. Hartland insisted on looking at his rent-book to see whether James had collected all the rents. I brought it to him, and he groped about with his hands to feel it.

"I can't quite see," he moaned; "my eyes—they aren't so good as they used to be. Read it to me, you nurse. What are you here for, wasting my money, if you can't read to me?"

"Let me read something else," I entreated, feeling tears rising in my eyes. "Kathleen, bring me a Bible."

"Business is business," gasped the dying man; "read the last page to me. I want to know—whether—that villain—what was I saying?"

Kathleen came nearer. We looked at each other.

"What do you know about—business?"

He glared at us, and struggled with his

breath. His hands wandered over the quilt. They touched the rent-book. A grin crept over the wrinkled face, and fixed there. His eyes rolled and shut.

"Agnes, now we can go home," whispered Kathleen, creeping to my side.

RICHENDA.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "The Thirteenth Brydain," "Catherine Maidment's Burden," "Benefit of Clergy," "The Vicar's Aunt," etc. etc.

CHAPTER XX.

It was two days later, and late in the evening. A neighbouring church clock was just striking nine as Jack Leicester turned into the street in which was the building that held Sir Roderick Graeme's flat. His face, always rather pale, looked much paler than usual. There was a worried, much-harassed look on it that accorded very ill with its boyish outlines, and the shrewd eyes were clouded with anxiety and doubt. He made his way up the long staircase of the flats rather slowly and wearily. His usual practice, when calling on Sir Roderick, was to spring up two steps at a time, with a cheery noisiness which did not always meet the views of the other dwellers in the building who caught the sound. But to-night there was no sign of cheeriness about him, and no suggestion of noise. He knocked at Sir Roderick's door, and was admitted. "Sir Roderick would be in directly, and would Mr. Leicester wait?" was the message the servant had received from his master, and Jack went into the smoking-room, and flung himself down in the nearest chair. He put his elbows on his knees, and, resting his chin in the palms of his hands, sat motionless staring steadily at the carpet.

Jack had spent two of the longest days in his life; days that had been filled, from morning to evening, from beginning to end of his day's work, with perturbation, indecision, and great anxiety. On the morning of the second of these days it had seemed to Jack that he could no longer maintain, alone and unaided, the weight of responsibility which, since his interview with Norton, and his subsequent meeting with Kennaway, had sat so heavily upon him. He had turned over in his mind again and again the possibility of finding some one with whom to take counsel. For a long time he had not been able to think of any one who might be willing and able to give him advice in his emergency.

Richenda and he had no relations. Her "society" friends were comparatively inaccessible to Jack, and, as even his judgment instantly decided, they were not likely to be of the least help had it been otherwise. He could think of no one but Norton. But though they were excellent friends, he had never been really intimate with Norton; nor did he place confidence enough in a man so slightly his senior to ask him to share a responsibility of this kind. Into the midst of his perplexities the sudden thought of Sir Roderick Graeme had come with a strong ray of hope. He was, to Jack's mind, the very person he needed; even if he could give no definite help, it would at least, Jack argued, be of some use to tell him the whole; and Sir Roderick would certainly be able to produce some sort of counsel, some suggestion to guide him in his perplexed anxiety. He had accordingly sent forthwith to Sir Roderick to say that he should go to his rooms that evening and hoped to find him at home; and the message he had just received was his answer.

He was wondering now, as he sat staring at the carpet, how he should place the whole case before Sir Roderick. He had not quite made up his mind what he really thought of it all, himself. It is needless to say how often in the past two days Jack had tried to arrange and define his own point of view. But it had always been in vain. Again and again he had returned to the same uncertainty and indecision.

Things looked convincing against Kennaway, he said: that is, the facts certainly almost amounted to convincing proof of Kennaway's interest in and connection with the woman in the hospital of whom Norton had told him. Jack had been quite keen enough to see that Kennaway had been greatly disturbed and annoyed at their meeting each other, and he had been in no wise taken in by his pretext of business in the locality. But, still, it all might be a most extraordinary series of coincidences. It was possible; just possible. Nothing more could be done until the points of the whole were proved: namely, who and what the woman was, and why Kennaway wished, as he evidently did, to keep the whole thing to himself.

Jack was turning this all over for the twentieth time, and trying to decide whether he should say to Sir Roderick that he believed the worst of Kennaway, or whether he should not commit himself at all until he had stated the case and heard what Sir Roderick said or thought, when the door

was quickly opened and Sir Roderick himself came in.

"Sorry I've kept you waiting, old fellow," he began heartily. "The more so as I'm most awfully glad you've come. I am——"

Sir Roderick broke off short, and the hand that he was just going to bring down in welcome on Jack's shoulder, fell back by his side.

"Great Scott, Jack," he said abruptly. "what in the name of fortune is the matter? You look as if you had all the cares in the world weighing on you. What's wrong?"

Jack had risen, but he had not spoken, and before he could do so, Sir Roderick spoke again. An idea seemed to strike him, quite suddenly, and his face grew oddly set.

"There's nothing——" he began hesitatingly:

Then he went on quietly:

"Jack," he said, "Jack, it isn't your sister? There's nothing amiss?"

"Richie's all right," Jack said quietly, "so far as that goes. I'm dreadfully bothered, though, and it's about her. I want you to help me, Graeme."

"To help you? You know I will, if it's to be done."

Sir Roderick sat down as he spoke, in a chair opposite to Jack's, on the other side of a little table that held pipes and ash-trays. He took up a pipe-case, and began to play with it, half in anxiety, half in impatience.

"Tell me what it is," he added hastily.

Jack had reseated himself also, and was again letting his eyes mechanically follow the pattern of the carpet.

"I can't quite tell how to put the case to you," he began. "I don't know exactly what I think about it myself. But, Graeme, look here, you don't believe in Kennaway a bit more than I do, in your secret soul, now do you?"

"You didn't come here to look into my beliefs, did you, old man?" said Sir Roderick drily, with a sharp snap of the pipe-case fastening. "And what has Kennaway to do with it?"

"Everything!" Jack answered wearily.

"Everything?"

"You said you were bothered about your sister, I thought; you don't mean—— Good heavens, Jack, you don't mean that Kennaway is daring to—to play any tricks in connection with her?"

Sir Roderick was bending forward in his

chair as he spoke, the leather case clenched tightly in his strong hand, gazing at Jack with staring, eager eyes. Jack's face was not visible; it was again bent on the carpet. But he raised it suddenly as Sir Roderick said impulsively:

"Speak, do! In the name of all that's good don't say he's done that!"

"That's precisely what I don't know," Jack answered slowly; "precisely what I want your advice and help about."

"Look sharp in telling me how to give it."

Sir Roderick was still leaning forward, and his other hand was now holding hard the arm of the wicker chair he sat in.

"Come to the point, Jack," he said almost sharply.

"Well, I believe I'd better tell you the facts just as I know them, and let you form your own judgement on them."

"I don't mind how you tell me, so long as you do tell me."

Sir Roderick's voice was very tense, and his expression very anxious.

"It was two days ago," Jack began.

He spoke slowly, as if he were considering how best to present the simple truth, uncoloured by his own deep anxiety and his doubts and difficulties. "I had just knocked off work," he began, "when Norton stopped me—you know Norton, you saw him in my study one day; he's a good sensible fellow enough, a lot above me as to standing, but he's been a friend of mine since I was a little chap. And it was because he was an old friend he thought he ought to speak to me. It was—he meant it no end kindly. This is what he told me." Therewith, in few but very clear words, Jack laid before Sir Roderick the substance of the account which Norton had given him concerning "the accident" brought into the hospital on that day. And, further, a careful account of his own meeting with Kennaway at the corner of the street immediately afterwards.

Sir Roderick listened in perfect silence. He had not moved an inch. When Jack began to speak he was still sitting in his intent, leaning forward position, one hand on the chair, the other clenched on the pipe-case; and he had not by so much as a hair's-breadth altered that position when Jack, after describing Kennaway's expression as well as he could, paused for breath. His face was many degrees paler, his breath was coming rather thickly, and his hand was so tightly clenched round the wicker as to make the knuckles stand out white.

He did not speak in the pause; but Jack apparently did not expect comment, for he did not wait for it.

"Of course," he went on reflectively, "I shouldn't have felt half so bad about it as I do feel if it hadn't been for meeting him there and then on the top of it all. I should have thought there was some sort of mistake, some rum coincidence or other; but for seeing him, and seeing him look as he did look—for all the world like something caught in a trap. I've thought it all over ever since without stopping, till I felt I must have some one else's advice and help and so on. I couldn't, for the life of me—for that matter I can't yet—see what I must do. At first I couldn't think who I could possibly find to talk to; then I thought of you; I wrote to you straight away; and I've come to you to hear first what you think of it; then, what you think I ought to do. I know," pursued Jack humbly, "that I'm young and all that sort of thing to look into it; but Richie's got no one else but me, and looked into it must be, I suppose."

"Looked into it shall be!"

The words came from between Sir Roderick's nearly closed lips, with an emphasis that made them into a sort of defiance to anything and any one who might oppose his intention.

"You think there's something wrong, then?"

"Think! I don't know what to think! I only know that you or I, or both of us, must and shall take steps to know all about it, down to the veriest detail."

Sir Roderick had risen from his chair, and pushed it back with a vigorous gesture as he spoke. He began to pace rapidly up and down in front of Jack. His face was set into the most rigid lines it had ever worn; his blue eyes held a dangerous gleam, and his mouth was compressed as Jack had never seen it before. Jack remained in his chair, waiting for the other to speak again. But Sir Roderick took three long silent turns up and down before he did speak.

"If his record isn't all right—if this thing is what it looks, Kennaway and I will have a reckoning—a reckoning founded on an old score," he muttered.

Jack looked at Sir Roderick half in surprise, half in doubt. He did not know how he had expected his friend to take his story, but he had certainly not expected him to betray so much personal interest, and so much emotion. A supposition that

had more than once crossed the shrewd boyish mind, came to it again now; and he very nearly, on the impulse of the moment, put it into words. But a steadier impulse corrected the first. Jack decided that he would do better to "let well alone," as he expressed it; and he turned his mind back to consideration of the serious question in hand.

"It may be all right," he began dubiously, "it may be that I've made a fool of myself in fussing over it. But, as I said, I'd rather look into it, if you'll say what steps I'd better take."

Sir Roderick gave a little laugh that was sardonic in its grimness.

"It may," he said tersely. "Oh, I grant you, Jack, it may. But we'll see the truth proved before we say any more. The next thing we can do will be this."

He threw himself down into a chair and began rapidly to detail to the listening Jack his proposed course of action.

CHAPTER XXI.

"JACK dear, don't you think you could spare half a quarter of a minute?"

"I really am most awfully busy. I truly haven't any time."

Richenda Leicester was kneeling by the fire in her drawing-room, warming her hands with a pretty movement. Close to the table on which he had hurriedly and rather noisily set down his coffee cup stood her brother Jack. The brother and sister had been dining together, quite alone; Mrs. Morris was kept in her room by neuralgia; and the twins, being absorbed in school preparation at dinner time, always dined earlier and separately.

Tête-à-tête dinners between Richenda and Jack were of very rare occurrence. Even if, as at present, Mrs. Morris chanced to be absent, some one else was almost certain to be present in her place. Among Richenda's new acquaintances were many girl friends, and very often indeed one or other of them dined at her house; sometimes as the end of a quiet evening spent with Richenda; sometimes as the prelude to a party or parties to which Richenda and the girl in question would probably go, under the wing of the same chaperon, who would "pick them up" at Richenda's house. Then there were many evenings on which Fergus Kennaway brought friends of his own to dine, and in an unobtrusive but decided manner, made himself more or less master of the ceremonies. Therefore,

thus broken up as all her evenings were, Richenda had welcomed this occasion with a great deal of pleasure. There were only about three weeks now left for her of her life at home with her brothers. Her marriage with Fergus Kennaway was to take place in the middle of April, and this was the last week of March. Her brothers were to live with them still, in Fergus Kennaway's house; but the old life, in which she and they had been alone, had only that short time more to run. This would very possibly be her last solitary dinner with Jack, she had thought as she dressed for it. And she had accordingly put on her prettiest gown and come downstairs prepared to make the most of the occasion. And she had sat down at the pretty, luxuriously appointed dinner-table with this intention foremost in her thoughts. She had talked and laughed; she had made Jack give up his usual place and come and sit beside her; she had devoted herself to him. But to her surprise, and greatly to her disappointment, her overtures had met with no response. Jack had not even seemed to notice the fact that they were dining alone together at all. She had thought he would be so pleased—so excited, even—at the chance of having her to himself; and he never even alluded to it. All through dinner he had been absent, distracted, and almost—though Richenda scarcely owned it—irritable. She had begun in turn every one of the subjects she thought most likely to interest him; and after a brief monosyllable or two he had let each drop in turn. A little flush of surprise and disappointment began to find its way to Richenda's face as she found each of her efforts to please and interest Jack thus repulsed. She tried again and again, but each time with less and less success; and at last, with a hot face and shining eyes, and a grievously disappointed heart, Richenda, at the end of dinner, had taken refuge in a silence which Jack did not attempt to break.

In the drawing-room, when she had given him his coffee, she had knelt on the fender stool, hoping that he would bring his cup to the fireside, and stand or kneel beside her. Perhaps, she thought, now that the servants were quite gone, he would be different. Perhaps he was only waiting to be quite alone with her to be his own brotherly self. But he had drunk it hurriedly, standing beside her, and had murmured something incoherent about being obliged to go away immediately.

"Oh, Jacky," she pleaded in response to his protest. "Dear Jacky, you said you weren't so dreadfully hard at work just now, and it would be so nice if you would come and sit here and talk to me a little."

"I can't," he said brusquely. "I really can't, Richie."

"Oh, but why?" she said, turning towards him, while she still held out one hand to the fire. "I haven't seen anything of you for ever so long, somehow. And, Jacky dear, I haven't got so very many evenings left now, you know."

Jack had turned his back to his sister, and a strangely gruff and wholly inarticulate sound was the only response he made to this.

"Do. There's a nice, dear boy," she begged. "I'll love you ever so much if you will."

"I can't," he reiterated still more brusquely. Then, as a little chiming clock on the mantelpiece struck a quarter past nine, he said hurriedly: "I told Graeme I'd come and see him this evening, Richenda, and I must go. He'll be waiting for me."

Without another word or look at her Jack went hastily and awkwardly out of the room, and a moment or two later Richenda heard the front door close heavily behind him.

For a moment or two Richenda knelt where she was, staring at the red-hot coals. Suddenly she became conscious that things were growing misty before her eyes, and with a little jerk she let herself fall into a sitting position on the fender stool upon which she had been kneeling. Her hands fell heavily on to her lap, and the tears that had made the fire misty stood visibly on her long eyelashes. She sat without moving for some moments, staring steadily at the fire. Then two or three short, tearless little sobs broke from her.

Richenda could not have accounted at all for her tears or her sobs; she could not have told why she felt, all at once, both lonely and unhappy. Indeed, she did not own to herself that she was unhappy; she simply let herself think, as she sat there looking into the fire, without making any effort to check or guide her thoughts. Perhaps, though, it would be truer to describe them as feelings than thoughts. They were feelings that had held their place in Richenda's heart for a long while, though never before to-night had she been definitely conscious of their presence there. Jack's refusal to stay with her had been, so to speak, the finishing touch which had

roused them all into reality, and made her sensible of them.

For several weeks now Richenda had vaguely known that the near prospect of her wedding brought her no real happiness at all. She had half-unconsciously shrunk from the contemplation of the fast-shortening interval. She had never wondered why she felt thus; she had not reasoned about it at all. She had simply felt it, and tried to put the feeling away from her as fanciful.

But it had refused to be wholly put aside. Every fresh detail of her preparations, every interview with her dressmaker, every necessary decision as to furniture in the house Fergus Kennaway had taken seemed to bring it forcibly before her again. These decisions were invariably made in Fergus Kennaway's company, and at his request; and it was on these occasions, even more than on those of her more personal arrangements, that Richenda felt that vague reluctance to think of the prospect before her. Behind her knowledge of this fact lurked on her mind a terrible shadow of fear; fear which she had never dared yet to let herself realise for an instant. She feared, nay, she knew, in the inmost recesses of her heart, that the strengthening when with him of her distaste to the prospect of the future, arose from the creeping distaste she was beginning to feel for Fergus Kennaway's personality. It was so terrible to her even to imagine this, that she drove the suggestion forcibly from her with dread and haste, always.

Nevertheless, its practical effects remained, and Richenda, had she questioned herself, would not have been able to deny that the few days when she and Fergus Kennaway did not meet were to her more of a relief than a disappointment. These were very few indeed. Kennaway spent with her, either at home or elsewhere, almost every evening and the greater part of every day. He was only more solicitously and sedulously attentive as the days of their engagement ran out than he had been at its beginning. The crumpled little note from him, which was at this moment in the pocket of Richenda's dinner dress, contained profuse apologies for his absence this evening.

"Most unexpected business" had detained him, he said. "Business connected with our marriage," he had added with a lover-like turn to end his sentence; and Richenda, when she read it, had crumpled up the sheet and thrust it away with a short sigh and an odd little shiver.

But all this only formed a background of

dissatisfaction to Richenda's thoughts now. She was not thinking of Kennaway, nor of her marriage. She was thinking about, or rather, as has been said, feeling, the influence of Jack's parting words.

He was going to Sir Roderick Graeme, he had said, and somehow Richenda did not know how or why, but from his words, and from her temporarily lonely position in the room, there rose before her a picture of that afternoon when she had been alone in the New Gallery, now so nearly a year ago; the afternoon when everything had been so different, and when Sir Roderick Graeme had first made her happier by his attention, and then made her so hurt and so wretched by his change of attitude. As she sat there, she was, half in a dream, going over all that afternoon again. She had often and often done this before, both in her old life and her new, dwelling with indignantly hurt pride on every detail of Sir Roderick's change of manner towards her; and always ending the remembrance with the same feeling—a feeling of wounded pride and bitter injury. This evening, however, for the first time, her recollections brought to her none of her former sensations. This evening she did not once dwell or wish to dwell bitterly on Sir Roderick's conduct. She felt nothing now but the odd thrill which Sir Roderick's first seeking her out had produced in her. For the first time now she smoothed over and tried to explain to herself his hitherto unexplainable and unforgiveable conduct; and she dwelt oddly on his face as it had looked when he

first came up to her. She remembered only how pleasant his smile had been, and how perfectly simple and frank his expression. This was followed, and it seemed as if the picture arose out of the hot coals, by a second picture of his face, changed and altered as it had been on the snowy afternoon when he had called, and she had been both harsh and cold to him. She had scarcely, save for their chance encounter on the door-steps, seen Sir Roderick Graeme since that day. He had never again called upon her, and she had not happened to meet him at other people's houses of late. And though, as she well knew, his visits to Jack were very frequent, they never included any notice of, or meeting with, herself.

A sudden, overwhelming wave of regret swept over her. Sir Roderick was gone out of her life; she had sent him out of it; and now, she said to herself with a quick breaking down into sobs for the second time, now Jack was gone from her too. He cared more to be with Sir Roderick, whose friendship she had despised and thrown away, than he cared to be with her. He could not love her, said poor Richenda, with a pitifully childish unreason, or he would have stayed with her. She had lost Jack, too, and there was nothing left to her, nothing now, but Fergus Kennaway. She raised her head from her hands, and stared again at the fire with very wide, wet eyes, while she played with trembling fingers with her little tear-stained handkerchief. Then she suddenly let it fall again, and cried as a tired, unhappy child might have cried.

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RICHENDA.

BY MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "*The Thirteenth Brydlein*," "*Catherine Maidment's Burden*," "*Benefit of Clergy*," "*The Vicar's Aunt*," etc. etc.

CHAPTER XXII.

"RICHIE, shall you be at home this afternoon?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Will any one be here?"

"Not that I know of. I'm going to do some turnings out of letters and papers, and mean to have a peaceful time if I can. But why, Jack?"

"Oh! I may be home early. That's all."

Jack Leicester was standing in the hall on the morning following his tête-à-tête dinner with his sister. He was ready to set off for his daily work, and Richenda, as her custom was, had come out of the dining-room with him to say good-bye to him.

Jack had asked his questions very awkwardly and hesitatingly; and with his last words he flung an arm still more awkwardly, but very lovingly, round his sister's neck, and kissed her; kissed her more than once with a most unusual and lingering fervour, and an odd tenderness.

"Good-bye," he said brusquely immediately afterwards; and, striding towards the door, he opened it without once looking back at her, went out, and banged it together behind him. Richenda, her face still flushed with surprise at his unusual manner, stood where he had left her, wondering what could have caused it. But after a moment or two of thought she decided, with a little deepening of the flush, and a happy soft light in her eyes, that Jack must have meant to make up for his manner of the night before; that his loving tender-

ness was a half shamefaced apology to her.

"Dear old boy!" she murmured lovingly to herself as she went back to the breakfast-room. "Yes; that must have been it!"

Richenda's face this morning bore scarcely any traces of her tears; it was peaceful and serene enough now, and the little smile that crept round her mouth quite completed the transformation. It was a smile of satisfaction in the happy explanation she had found.

Nevertheless, as the hours of the day went by, the remembrance of Jack's manner recurred to Richenda more than once. Something unusual about the touch and kiss seemed to haunt her, in spite of her explanation of it. She spent, with Mrs. Morris, a long and rather wearisome "shopping" morning; and during the intervals in choosing between silks and satins, laces and embroideries, ribbons and velvets, Richenda's thoughts flew with odd persistency away from her trousseau, the crowded shops, and the very obsequious shopmen, back to Jack's morning leave-taking. She seemed to feel its influence through everything; his voice and his touch recurred again and again. Even at the quiet luncheon with Mrs. Morris which followed her long morning, his manner would not leave her thoughts; still Richenda thought of it and wondered about it.

She was not at all a fanciful nor a particularly imaginative woman; but still she was haunted, half unconsciously, by more than the fanciful thought concerning her brother to-day. She felt a vague sense of something; she did not know what, but it was almost oppression that touched her when she thought of Jack and his kisses.

"One would think something was going to happen to him or to me," she said to

herself, laughing lightly as, about four o'clock in the afternoon, she sat in the smoking-room surrounded by a litter of old letters and papers, in course of being sorted and arranged. She was quite alone. She had seen nothing of Fergus Kennaway all day. No letter nor message had reached her from him. At first she had been just a little surprised at this, but then she had taken for granted that he would appear sooner or later, and had not troubled to think again about it. Being occupied with her task she had not paid much heed to anything else; she had caught no sound of footsteps on the soft carpet outside, and she started violently when, just after she had spoken the words to herself, the door was opened with a sharp movement, and Jack came into the smoking-room. He shut the door behind him and stood beside it, holding to the handle with a desperate sort of hold. Richenda looked up and smiled at him—smiled cheerily. His actual presence seemed to sweep away the intangible fancies that had been associated with her last sight of him, in her mind throughout the day, and to make them utterly absurd and worthless.

"You are nice and early," she said happily.

But all at once her manner changed.

Jack's face at her bright voice had become suddenly drawn and odd. It had been very white when he entered; it grew a curious ashen colour now, and his lips twitched nervously.

"Richenda," he said in a hoarse voice, quite unlike his own, "I want to speak to you, Richie, please."

Richenda rose hurriedly from her low chair, scattering unheeded to the floor a lapful of letters and papers. She had not been mistaken, then, she said to herself as her heart beat quickly. Something was wrong. Something was going to happen. What was it? Oh, what was it?

"Jack!" she said anxiously, her face paling a little, "Jack, what do you want; what have you come to say? I'm sure something has happened. Is it—is it the twins, Jack?"

Jack seemed to tear himself by a great effort from the support of the door-handle. He seemed at the same time to brace his whole personality for a still greater one. He came silently to her side on the hearthrug.

"No, Richie," he said, "no; they're all right! Richie, dear, dear old Richie, it's you! And I've got to tell you; and I don't know how to begin!"

"What do you mean, Jack?"

Richenda was standing very upright, with one hand resting on the mantelshelf and the other hanging by her side. Her face was white, and her beautiful eyes shone out from its pallor like two stars.

"If it's not the twins," she continued, "and you're here, and I'm here, how can it be me? Tell me, do tell me!"

Her voice had been strained and sharp as she began, but it broke into an entreaty at the end.

Jack's only response was a sort of choked groan. He let his face fall forward, resting his forehead on the edge of the mantelshelf for a moment as if to gain time. Then he raised it again hurriedly, and looked his sister full in the face.

"It's got to be done!" he muttered; "and I must do it. Richie," he went on firmly, "it is you. It is you whom I'm going to hurt; it's—it's something about Kennaway that I've got to tell you."

"Something about—Fergus?"

Richenda's voice seemed to come from far away, and it was trembling and uneven. Jack took the quiver in its tones as a sign of the pain she must be suffering, and the muscles of his face grew tense with his great longing to save her from what was to come.

"Yes," he said, "Richie, darling; if you would sit down, if you weren't looking at me, I believe I could tell you better. Sit down, please sit down."

He drew a chair forward, and Richenda, quite mechanically, obeyed him, and let herself sink down into it. Jack took one of her hands in his, and turning half away from her stood looking fixedly down into the fire.

"I'll tell you from the beginning," he said. "But I'll make it as short as I can. It's several days ago now; one night when I was coming home, one of the fellows told me that a woman had been brought into the hospital who knew Kennaway. An accident it was; she was delirious, and she called for him; and they sent for Kennaway."

"A woman? A woman who knew him? Who?"

Richenda's voice was nothing but the hoarsest whisper. Jack held her fingers closer in his own, and then went on with a choke in his voice.

"A woman who knew him; yes. She told them at the hospital that she was—she was his wife—and, Richie; oh, Richie, my darling, it's true, and she is!"

The choke in Jack's voice overmastered him, and he broke off. Richenda snatched her hand from his hold, and stood up suddenly.

"Jack," she said, "Jack; how can you say such a thing! How can you bring me such an absurd report! Fergus is going to marry me! He has no wife. He will have no wife till I am his wife. In a fortnight!"

She spoke in abrupt, jerky sentences, each uttered more defiantly than the last. And the defiance seemed directed against herself as much as against her brother. A pink spot of colour was coming and going in her cheeks, and her great, wide eyes were very brilliant.

"My darling, you can't ever be his wife; he alone knows how he has dared to propose it to you. She is his wife; and he can have no other. Oh! Richie, Richie, dearest, thank Heaven we found it out in time!"

"But how do you know it? How can you prove it? Where is Fergus himself? Why doesn't he come and contradict you? Why does he let you bring me such a story!"

Richenda spoke almost wildly; her voice rose with each word, and her eyes shone brighter every instant.

Jack had not moved nor turned to face her since he had made his statement. But now he moved, all at once, and turning to Richenda with an air of resolution and manliness that seemed to take away all his boyishness and change it into manhood, he took both her hands in his own.

"Dearest, I know," he said steadily. "I know it is true. Is it likely, Richie, that I should give you the pain of hearing, and myself the pain of telling you what I did not know to be true?"

"No!" she said, in a quick, low voice; "no, you wouldn't, I know. But I can't believe it, Jack! I can't believe it! It seems as if it couldn't be true! Tell me how you know. Tell me all about it."

"I know because I've seen her marriage certificate; I would give all I most care for not to have had to say this to you; but I have seen it with my own eyes; there is no shadow of doubt in the matter. The man who married them has been seen; the entry has been examined. Darling, everything that could be done has been done; everything!"

"I know, I know!" she said, and then she drew her hand from Jack's and pressed it to her forehead with a bewildered gesture.

"But I can't believe it! It seems to me as if I were all in a dream. It can't be real, truly. Fergus can't have a wife! Oh, I can't! I can't believe it! Oh, Jack, if I must believe it, make me believe it! I can't, indeed. I can't feel that it isn't a dream!"

For a moment Jack looked bewildered and irresolute. Then, very gently, loosening his hand from hers, he put her into a chair and hurried out of the room. Richenda did not stir so much as a finger while he was gone; she sat where Jack had placed her, perfectly rigid, and looking more like a marble statue than a living woman. Only two or three minutes had passed, though to her stunned senses the time might have been two or three hours, when the door opened again, and Jack re-entered, followed at a little distance by a second figure.

Jack went up to Richenda, and touched her very tenderly.

"Richie," he said as she looked up at him with her heavy but shining eyes, "I've asked Graeme to tell you all he——"

Richenda started, and caught at her brother's arm.

"Does he know?" she said in a thin, weak voice, placing an emphasis on the pronoun.

"He's helped me all through," Jack said. "He's done all that can be done for me, and for you; and he'll explain to you better than I have been able to do, that it's true—all dreadfully true."

Richenda stood up abruptly, and steadied herself by leaning heavily on Jack's shoulder. Her face was rigidly composed as she turned towards the door.

"Sir Roderick," she said, quite steadily, "please will you come nearer? Please come closer, I can speak better if you do."

Sir Roderick's face was almost as white as Richenda's own; there were lines about his mouth which he tried quite vainly to subdue as he came up to the brother and sister; lines of intense pity and longing.

"Jack says you know. Jack says you've helped him find the truth!" Richenda's voice was clear and low, but trembling very much. "Please tell me if it really is the truth? Has Fergus Kennaway deceived me? Is he really, in truth, married already? I can't believe it. I can't take it in!"

Sir Roderick moistened his lips once or twice, and by a great effort managed to find his voice, and to make it steady as he said slowly:

"Yes, I do know. I know that all Jack has told you is true."

He stopped. Richenda withdrew her hand from her brother's shoulder, and stood straight and upright before the two.

"Thank you," she said slowly. "Thank you very much. I must be by myself. I must think."

And gently putting aside Jack's loving and detaining grasp, Richenda went slowly, but quite steadily, out of the room.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It was five hours later. Richenda was lying on a sofa in her own dressing-room. The room was dark, save for the light of a wood fire; no candles or lamps had been lighted in it, and the curtains over the windows Richenda had drawn with her own hands long before the daylight had begun to wane. She had come straight up to the room when she had left Jack and Sir Roderick, craving only for darkness and loneliness. For the first hour she had walked up and down the room, her hands pressed over her eyes, as if to shut out even a glimmer of light from her. Backwards and forwards with restless, unceasing step, she had trodden the soft carpet until, all at once, her bodily strength had seemed to fail her, and she had stopped short suddenly, and thrown herself, with a movement of utter exhaustion, on the wide, low sofa by the fire. And there, without moving almost, she had lain ever since.

No one had disturbed her—the servants had had orders earlier in the day that she was not to be interrupted that afternoon—and it was not until it was time to dress Miss Leicester for dinner that her maid had knocked at her door. Richenda had sent the woman away again with a formal message to Jack to the effect that she had a headache, and should not go down to dinner; and she had again been left alone.

The clock of the church at the corner of the square was just striking the first quarter past nine, when a second knock, very soft and deprecating, came to her door. Richenda did not hear it at first, and it was repeated.

"Come in," she said mechanically and very wearily.

The door was gently opened, and her own maid entered softly.

"If you please, Miss Leicester," the woman began hesitatingly. Then she glanced at the prostrate, exhausted-looking figure of her mistress, and stopped.

"What is it, Lucy?"

Richenda's voice was weak, and it had a half-stifled sound, for her face was almost buried in the pillows of the sofa.

"If you please, ma'am, Mr. Kennaway is here——"

Richenda lifted herself into a sitting position with a gesture which, by its unexpectedness, startled Lucy, as did also the sight of her mistress's face in the firelight.

"Miss Leicester did look awful, to be sure," she reported, on her return to the servants' premises. "It wouldn't have been me as would have seen Mr. Kennaway, or any one else, with that headache."

But she had no time for reflection at the moment; Richenda brushed aside her falling hair and made an impatient sign to the maid to proceed.

"He is just come, ma'am," pursued Lucy. "Masters told him you could see no one, but he wouldn't listen. He said he was quite sure you would see him, and Masters was to announce him at once."

There was a spice of indignation in Lucy's tone. Mr. Kennaway had never been any favourite with Miss Leicester's household. His subdued but distinctly aggressive air of possession of the house, its mistress, and all its inmates, had been distinctly irritating to the menial portion of those inmates. And Lucy, who dearly loved her mistress, had had several struggles of mind before she could decide to remain with her under Mr. Kennaway's roof.

"So Masters came to me," she continued, "and asked me to tell you, so as she could take back a message direct from you to Mr. Kennaway. What shall I say, if you please, ma'am?"

"Say? Nothing! Light the candles, Lucy, and get out my dressing things. Not a dress; I shall not change it to-night."

Richenda spoke in a voice which made a singular impression when taken in conjunction with her white and wretched appearance. It was sharp and unusually imperious; and the movements with which she accompanied it were startling in their energy. She had risen, and was standing in the middle of the room as she spoke the last words.

"You will see Mr. Kennaway, ma'am!" said Lucy, half doubting the evidence of her senses as to Miss Leicester's intention.

"Yes. Go and tell Masters to let him know this, as soon as you've got my things. You needn't stay. I shall manage for myself."

And before the bewildered Lucy had left the dressing-room, Miss Leicester had begun to arrange, with quick, dexterous hands, the dishevelled braids of her pretty hair. She gave a touch or two to her dress, just to straighten it; and then she turned to go out of the room.

The contrast between the Richenda who had come upstairs five hours ago and the Richenda who stood at the door now, prepared to go down, was indescribable. Richenda's face was perfectly colourless, still; no tinge of colour whatever had been brought to it by her sudden movements or her sudden decision. But every line in it was very marked, every muscle was braced, every curve rigid. It looked like a stone rather than a living face; and her great eyes shone out of the surrounding whiteness with a cold, determined glitter. Her plain grey tweed morning dress seemed to enhance this severe rigidity. It seemed as she swept down the brilliantly lighted staircase, to form, by its incongruity at that hour of the day, another detail of the strangeness of her appearance.

No one was visible; as far as any evidence to the contrary went, Richenda might have been quite alone in her own house. She opened the drawing-room door with a firm touch, and entered.

"Ah! Richie!"

Fergus Kennaway had been standing by the mantelpiece idly playing with the small ornaments upon it. He turned and came towards her. But Richenda threw out both her hands with a gesture of unmistakable repulsion.

"Go!" she said, "go away from me. Don't dare to come near me! Don't dare to address me so!"

Her voice was low and rather weak, but it was ringing at the same time with an intense scorn.

Fergus Kennaway started, started visibly and violently, and his face paled all at once.

"What does this mean?" he said, with a rather uncertain little laugh. "Are you mad, Richenda, or are you dreaming?"

"I am neither," was the answer. "I know what I am doing; I know what I am going to do."

Richenda, her slight figure drawn up to its fullest height, and her white face strong in its proud composure, had walked to a table nearly in the middle of that end of the room. There she placed herself, one hand leaning upon the table, the other tightly clenched round a fold of her tweed

gown. Fergus Kennaway was standing facing her on the hearth-rug. He had returned at her first words to his original position there.

"What do you mean?" he repeated. "You are using me most strangely, Richenda! I cannot understand you in the least."

"I think you can—if you try," she said in a strangely significant voice. "I know—everything."

For an instant Fergus Kennaway's small eyes met those large glittering ones which were fixed upon him. Then suddenly they fell, and he quailed strangely. But only for a moment. The next instant he had assumed his own assured, easy manner again. And, with a trifling accentuation of his ordinary coolness, he said lightly:

"I'm afraid, possibly, that you may have learned of the existence of some false reports concerning me. I was anxious to save you from any worry of this kind; but it is possible that there are persons who are quite ill-considered enough to bring them to your knowledge. If you will let me know if this is so; and, further, tell me——"

But Richenda broke in upon his easy speech.

"I have heard no reports," she said, and her voice, with its biting accent on the noun, seemed to come from between her set white lips with an effort. "I have heard the truth, the whole truth, about you. And I only tolerate your presence in my house now that I may tell you this, and tell you that I scorn and despise you."

"What have you heard?"

The voice was not quite so cool, nor the manner quite so careless. And Fergus Kennaway, unconsciously, as he spoke, moved back a step into the corner by the mantelpiece, as if to get further from the light of Richenda's glittering eyes.

"I have heard—I know, that is to say, of the existence of your wife——"

"There is no such person—yet!" with a laugh, which he tried to make easy and confident, but which was only loud and harsh.

"Don't make me scorn you more still by lying to me."

Richenda's eyes seemed to blaze as she spoke, and Fergus Kennaway shrank a little further away.

"It is utterly useless," Richenda went on, "and can alter nothing of what I know. It is so much wasted energy to lie to me. Your wife——"

"Of whom are you talking?"

Fergus Kennaway had gathered all his force together to make another effort for his usual manner, but it was of no avail. The would-be careless tones were harsh, and his voice was uneven and uncontrolled.

"Of the woman at this moment in the Central Hospital; the woman who is so wretched as to have given herself into your keeping. Thank Heaven that I am not she!"

The last words seemed to break involuntarily from Richenda; and the energy with which she spoke them was almost fierce in its intensity. For the first time since she had come into the room Fergus Kennaway did not attempt to answer her. He had slipped one hand into his pocket, and the other was holding to a bit of carving in the mantelshelf supports. He stood, his brows sharply contracted, and his small eyes gleaming with a sullen sort of fire.

"I shall not stay to enter into the question of what you have done," she said, "or of what I think of you. There are no words that I could possibly use which could convey to you my feeling for you, my loathing for you," she repeated emphatically. "I blame myself, myself most and first, for the position in which I stand to-night. I knew what you were—you showed me that yourself—long ago. I knew you had no sense of honour, of truth, or of anything that was right; and it was I who took the first step to what has brought me to this, when I said I would marry you. How could I ever have done it? I scorn myself for my weakness—I hate myself!"

Richenda took her hand from the table, brought it sharply against the other, and clenched them tightly together.

Fergus Kennaway made a movement. While she spoke, he had been absolutely still, only watching Richenda from under his lowering brows.

"The game's up," he muttered sullenly; "I see that. You needn't trouble to make your meaning any clearer, thank you," he said, glancing up at the white-faced woman before him with an ugly smile. "But as you've made your innings pretty complete, I don't see why I shouldn't have mine. In the first place, may I ask what proof you have of your remarkably sweeping assertions as to a woman in the Central Hospital, who may choose to have a crazy fancy to think she knows me? If every man in London acknowledged as his wife every woman

who chose to think she had a claim on that title, life would be even more complicated than it is at present! I repeat: may I ask for your proofs?"

"The certificate of her marriage with you."

Fergus Kennaway had regained, during his speech, a shadow of his old self. A sort of faint imitation of his own cool confidence grew in his voice as he proceeded. But Richenda's calmly spoken words went far to destroy it again. He recoiled, almost as if a physical blow had touched him. For a moment there was perfect silence in the room, broken only by the slow cracking of the coals in the fire and Richenda's measured breathing. Then he seemed to collect himself once more.

"May I ask who has seen this valuable proof?" he said.

"My brother."

"A chit of a boy like that! What good is his word?"

"Sir Roderick Graeme also is in possession of the facts."

Fergus Kennaway started slightly. Then he laughed; a low sneering laugh.

"Now we come to it!" he said. "Now daylight is visible. It's well to incriminate the old love before you are on with the new. Now it is all clear enough."

"Go!" Richenda's voice was ringing in its command. "Go! and never let me see you again."

For an instant Kennaway hesitated, and his face showed a sullen defiance. Then he moved towards the door. Exactly opposite Richenda he stopped.

"You shall do me this justice," he said. "I believed, when I asked you to marry me, that there was just a chance that she—curse her—was dead. I acted on that chance. It has failed."

Without another word Fergus Kennaway left the room and left the house. Richenda stood listening until she heard the sound of the closing front door, and then she fell heavily, unconscious, into the nearest chair.

A SUNDAY IN PEAKLAND.

I TRAVELLED the other evening—in mid-November—from Sheffield to Hope, in the heart of the Peak district. The new Dore and Chinley line gives one the chance of approving a fine tunnel. There were six or seven passengers in my carriage, including an old woman swollen with packages. It was instructive to see how this ancient

person clutched her lamp, bacon, and groceries, while we hissed through the tunnel. Now and then she turned her wrinkled brow plaintively towards either window, to see if she could comfort herself with the sight of a star. The seven or eight minutes of our incarceration seemed to drag on to twenty.

My other companions were also interesting. Their tawny complexions, large loose limbs, eccentric beards and whiskers, and especially their speech, declared them Peaklanders. This new railway line must be as good to them almost as an additional pair of lungs. The long brooding shapes of the fell tops and the moor edges are splendid to the tourist in summer, or when the heather dyes them a sunny purple. But they are a distinct bar to free locomotion in the time of snow. Nowhere in England may a man easier come to his death than on these lonely plateaux. The wind is so fierce here, and shelter is so hard to find.

"Ay," said a farmer, with a grizzled beard that curved outwards like a fish-hook, "it serves me well, this railway. It dunna seem like the same place! Ay, an' it'll serve thee better nor me, John."

The "John" addressed was a dark young man, who dwelt up the Grindelford Road. He acquiesced promptly. The accommodating cars had taken him from his mill—or something of the kind—at noon, enabled him to see a classic football match in the cutlery town, do a vast deal of useful business between four o'clock and six, and get home to his supper in Derwent valley in ample time for pipes and malt liquor afterwards, and the last dregs of week-day gossip, in the village ale-house.

"But the lanes o' nights is dark!" put in the old woman, with her skinny arm round the lamp-stand.

It seemed as if she, at any rate, thought civilisation rather a bore.

I left the train at Hope; that is to say, as near to Castleton as I could get by the rails. Hitherto the capital of Peakland has not had its wilds and solitudes ransacked by the echoes of the engine's screechings. The sounds just reach the grey old town and its Castle keep overhead. But they are not strong enough to be aggressive; nor does the background of mountain, before which Castleton lies like a man at the foot of a Japanese screen, exaggerate and toy with the sounds as one would suppose.

The night was dark, and the roads were slimy with the famous grey mud of the

land. I set off to walk the two miles to Castleton, rather enjoying than otherwise the prospect of the phantasmal nature of the landscape around me. The gloom was so great that even the fells were not visible. Only the whitish road gleamed like a moon-lit ribbon before me.

But the mud beat me. It was no pleasure to slide about in such stuff, and the puddles were of a calamitous depth.

A church spire stood up when I had gone half a mile, and a gentle bell chimed the hour. Some stumpy cottages were also conjecturable by the lights in their little windows. Passing a wall, I saw five or six jetty shapes set against it, with pallid ovals some sixty or seventy inches from the ground. These were villagers enjoying themselves in the peace of Saturday night. They could see no more of their surroundings than I of mine. Yet there they stood, silent and monumental, just sufficiently spectral to be alarming to a stranger not in the secrets of local manners.

This was the village with the cheerful name of Hope; and opposite the church spire is an inn. A man not averse to omens would, it seemed to me, be doing himself grave wrong if he abode not in so exhilaratingly suggestive a hamlet.

And so I pushed the lamplit door of the inn, and, paying no heed to the babble from the smoke-room, proceeded until I faced the large, low-beamed kitchen of the disestablished manor-house—for such it was. Here, for a moment, confusion seized me. I had intruded on the privacy of the house. A comely girl of two or three-and-twenty had lately washed her neck and shoulders, and was now vigorously drying them and creating a most attractive skin glow. But she minded me not, and took my request as moderately as if it were only another towel. The matter had to be cogitated: could they or would they not accept me as a sleeping guest? I tarried for minutes while two or three of them—one man and two women, to be precise—talked it over in their palates in the curious local way. Sentence was at length passed upon me by a dark girl in strong contrast with the blonde washing one.

"Yes, you can have a bed," she said.

Half an hour later, the same request was put by a portly gentleman who shared a tea of beefsteak and ham with me. He had, like myself, felt an insatiable desire for some pure air, and so he had walked into Peakland from the west. He could

return home by train, late though it was, but felt disinclined to do so.

"It's a large old house, this of yours, my lass," he said paternally to the waiting damsel. "I'm sure you can accommodate me."

"Yes," was the reply, "you can have a bed, but you'll both be in the same room. There's no other."

But the double-bedded enterprise did not succeed so well. My friend thought he had better go home, and though I appreciated his company, I did not try to dissuade him. Experience has taught me that it is always safer to have one's room to oneself.

When I had smoked my cigar, in the midst of the village gossip, I strolled forth into the black air. For November it was very mild.

The organ drifted solemn music across the graves towards the inn from the church. To the church porch therefore I groped, to taste what sensations the dimly-lit building could give me. It was not lavish in this respect. Still, I am glad to have thus seen the old edifice, with its single lamp by the organist's chant-book, and the feeble glow of it stealing to the arches in the nave and eventually confounded by the vigorous darkness in the west. I stole in and stole out, and the musician heeded me not.

Then I walked at a venture down the street by the inn, with thin shafts of lamp-light here and there from cottage windows across the slimy road. The noise of a brawling stream alone mated with the splash, splash of my own footsteps. Once, however, a bell tinkled weakly to the left. That was the wicket of a little general store, behind the counter of which a full-bodied dame could be seen leaning with an affable smile on her broad cheeks. "Good night, missus," said the departing customer, and the lady of the shop responded, "Good night, William."

It got lighter as I left the village behind me. Half-a-dozen or more bonny stars marked the high outline of Win Hill, which looks down closely at Hope from its fifteen hundred feet of elevation. The fell was very black under the influence of these November-night conditions, and rather awesome.

Now, drowning the babble of the stream to the right, came the deep thunder of a train. Red lights and a shriek or two, and the monster dashed by towards Sheffield.

A year ago the valley knew nothing of such tumults. But it has soon fallen in with the fashion so prevalent elsewhere.

The little stream suddenly begets a cascade. It falls a score of feet in a fine bold incline. Its white face thus stretched out in the gloom has a remarkable, almost, indeed, an eerie effect. From afar the Hope church chimes ten, and I retrace my slippery steps to the inn. The last roysterers are still about its porch when I get there, and my blonde damsel is persuading them to betake themselves to their homes as calmly as possible.

I am the sole guest now. The blonde girl instals me in the bar parlour, with my whisky and her conversation as additional comforts. She tells me that she is never less tired than on Saturday nights, when, according to all rules, she ought to be at her weariest. Sunday, on the contrary, exhausts her. Times are when she feels at bedtime, after evening service at Castleton, as if she would like to shirk the responsibilities of a new Monday. Yet when Monday breaks she rises refreshed, and the week's incongruities begin again.

In town, on the first day of the week, I do not study the clock of a morning. Here, however, I was at breakfast at eight. A young fire at my back proved, what I had feared, that I had slightly dislocated local habits.

The fells were all under mist. It looked a somewhat unlikely day. Rain or sunshine might gain the ascendancy, with rain as the more probable issue. But, rain or sunshine, I meant to stretch my legs through Peakland. Ere I returned to my arm-chair and the huge manorial chimney-piece of the Hope inn, I proposed to see much of Derbyshire's fairest nook of country.

The thick-spined church hard by yet again greeted my outgoing steps with a chime. It was nine o'clock. I followed my stream of the night before, looking with interest at the square-windowed little stone cottages on both hands, each a small manor house in itself. The Sabbath quiet possessed the place. For a mile I met no one except a shiny-faced little boy dragging a shiny-faced little girl in the direction of my village. There was an aunt in Hope, I judge, to be visited. The little boy threatened the little girl with her displeasure—"Yer aunty 'll give it yer"—whereupon boo-hoos arose, and the child's legs fought anew against progress. There are aunts and aunts. I wondered about this aunt of Hope as I picked my way through the profound puddles of the road.

My route and the River Noe ran side by side. The latter had decidedly an interesting

personality. One moment it swept round a corner at a rush, showing radiant pebbles beneath it; a little later and it ambled majestically between tall black banks hung with brambles and fringed with trees, and tried to look as Stygian and important as if it had a dreadful history of its own. But it never succeeded in deceiving me. I read all its moods as if it were a child, and enjoyed them as one enjoys the fickleness and innocence of a four-year-old.

As a companion to the stream, I had to put up also with the stark new railway line, its bridges and freshly piled embankments. This was distressing, and yet it grew more and more endurable as the day progressed, and the olive and brown roots of the fells enlarged from out of the mist and showed me something of their summits. I could see long, mysterious dimples in their sides—"cloughs," to give them their Peakland name—with about one farmhouse to the mouth of each dimple, and a little tangle of holly-trees and scrub pressing the brook which invariably tumbled from the clough into the Noe. The fell sides were still merrily aglow with the yellow and russet bracken. I thought for sure that I was in for some gay spectacles anon.

But November fought hard for its own weather. Once overhead I had blue sky, and a weak beam of positive sunshine broke upon a patch of hill. But it did not last. It was doomed even while it tried to linger. I could see the mist surging up from the west, and whereas one minute Kinder Scout contrived—with an effort indeed—to lift a fine pinnacle of its great mass high over the pale-brownish vapour, the next it was gone, and the whole of the valley was expunged save its lowest depths.

I reached Edale contemporaneously with the starting of its church bell, and the arrival of a train from Manchester. How happy may the denizens of this depressing city consider themselves, that they can thus in a couple of dozen or score of minutes run from its obscure slums to these fine haunts of Nature! From their appearance and loud hearty chatter, some of the travellers this Sunday morning had done just this thing.

"They will be surprised!" said a merry-faced girl to a lusty youth, who had met her at the station.

Had the day been more settled, I would have tarried here and entered the church with the rest. The old chapel has gone; a brand-new spired concern reigns in its stead. This somewhat lessened my enthusiasm about Edale, even as the mist kept it lower

than it would have been could I have seen Kinder Scout and Mam Tor.

For one minute I paused by the "Church Inn," kept by John Burdikin, and listened to the bell. The yew-trees here backed the testimony of the house's architecture in witness of its age. Centuries ago, the folks who came to Edale chapel used the inn as liberally and methodically as they used the chapel. They discussed the week's doings here, after listening more or less to the sermon there; and, having refreshed their souls there, they here ministered to their bodies. In the Lake District there are several of these Church Houses (or inns) which get even nearer to the church gates than the parsonages themselves.

I warrant Mr. John Burdikin—whose countenance showed at a window—would like these ancient times to recur. Not a person seemed disposed to patronise him to-day. The one individual who passed his house while I waited was a decorous dame with a chestnutty face, dressed all in black. She gathered her skirts high in her hands as she left the inn on one side, and her large boots creaked protestingly.

Edale valley was now just a long green sprawl, hugged every way by the grey mist. It seemed pretty safe to expect a drenching in the enterprise before me. This was nothing less than an ascent of six or seven hundred feet into the core of the vapour, whence I hoped to be allowed to descend, sodden rather than soaked, into the Chapel-en-le-Frith high-road to Castleton. I would dearly have liked to see something definite of Mam Tor, by whose col I was to make my passage. But I had to take him all on faith. From Barber Booth, a ramshackle little hamlet a mile west of Edale, I saw my road climb abruptly into the fog the other side of the stream and disappear, like a tall ladder thrust up into a cloud.

Heathery moorland, steaming cattle, rusty railings strung with rain-drops, and the mist-hugged mountain; these were my surroundings until I zigzagged to the narrow cutting in Mam Tor which parts the Edale valley from that of the Chapel road. A vigorous breeze blew in my face, and told me I might now hope to taste another quality of the weather.

And so I turned on Mam Nick, saluted the fog-embraced landscape I was leaving, and broke by a wind-shattered coppice towards the white high-road beneath me. Save for the plantation by my side, this view held no trees. There were bare brown

fell tops enough, with their slopes coldly divided into fields. A stolid sky canopied the stolid and far from jocund scene.

But what is this sign-post alongside the high-road, a few hundred yards only from Mam Nick? What should it be, rather, if not the finger-post to the famous Blue John Mine, whose spar is one of the loveliest products of old mother Earth? There is a description of it on the board. Of course it is lauded as the finest show in Derbyshire. It is, moreover, "easy, clean, safe of access"—no trivial feather in the cap of its attractions when one thinks of the sorry plight one has been reduced to elsewhere in burrowing into underground recesses.

Of course, however, Blue John is under lock and key to-day. I tender the cavern my respects, and hurry on beneath the black amphitheatrical summit of Mam Tor to Castleton. Mam Tor has another name: the Shivering Mountain. The shale of which he mainly consists is very susceptible to wintry influences. Frost and snow disintegrate him sadly. He trembles and breaks. This constant weathering keeps him in a picturesque state of assured precipitousness on his eastern side.

The road descends sharply. I pass three little girls returning from church to the farmhouse under Mam Tor. I pass also another advertisement board, which directs me to the Grand Speedwell Mine, "whose bottomless depths are unfathomable," and am soon in the precincts of Castleton. The hoar Castle keep up above broods cataclysmically over the collection of roofs and the one grey church tower.

The town is pervaded by silence and the rich perfume of roast meats. I have, in fact, hit the Sunday dinner hour plump in its midst. What shall I do? Would it not, I ask myself, be kinder to give the landlady of the inn I select another quarter of an hour or so—for her pudding's sake—ere demanding a meal of her? The question seems a reasonable one.

I answer it by turning off to the right by the side of a pellucid, impetuous little brook which comes from the heart of the mountains, here closely impendent. There are small houses all the way to the very mouth of the Peak Cavern, to which I am approaching. One of them lives on a magical well, and a board reminding the visitor that this is the way to it; "Only one penny." Several have their windows secularly stuffed with trifles in spar, alabaster, and what not, presents from Castleton and so forth. The brook sings shrilly amid them all, and the

Castle keep looks more and more shaky on its rocky river perch some three hundred feet above.

A serene-faced old woman, "framed in white hair," peers forth at me from her little wooden cottage in one place; she has something on a fork at the moment, and she holds it in suspense while her vision takes stock of me. But I do not mind such harmless inspection, especially as the roadway is quite clear of souls, and I can, unimpeded, make for the black gaping mouth of the Peak Cavern. Here I sit at my ease and look at the smoke-grimed dome over me, the curious intruding rope works which occupy all the solemn vestibule to the caverns; the sing-song little brook, just deep enough to drown a kitten, which breaks from the cavern precincts below; the ivy-draped perpendicular limestone wall of rock which focusses the cavern, with the Castle on its top; and the grey jumble of Castleton beyond.

It is very peaceful and pleasant, and I smoke a cigarette while I rest. But I have been injudicious in my choice of a seat. This is proclaimed by my sudden downfall. The chain between two posts, selected because I love to swing my legs, snaps without warning. I have just a chance of rolling down into the brook and presenting a spectacle to shock any landlady properly clothed with Sabbath sentiments. I am more than thankful that I am saved from the dilemma such a predicament would have placed me in.

As for the murky depths of the cavern, I care nothing about them. I have seen so many of these holes, from that of Adelsberg downwards. Besides, it is, of course, shut like the others.

Thence to dinner. I am welcomed warmly, as I quite expected to be, having timed my apparition to the most genial minute in the daytime of a human being. My landlady talks about crops, and trade, and beasts as effusively as if both of us were interested in nothing else. And she leaps at another subject, which I suggest to her, with an alacrity that could hardly be expected of her a few hours later.

The subject is this. A certain metropolitan paper of enterprise not long ago conceived the idea of publishing the portraits of the most beautiful barmaids in the land, and giving these damsels a watch and chain apiece and the precious "testamur" of an advertisement. Now it happened that this Castleton hotel contained a beautiful barmaid. Her portrait duly appeared

—and really it was tolerably engaging—she received her watch, saw her name in print, and was for weeks the cynosure of gadding and eager eyes.

"Where," I asked my landlady, "is this pretty girl of yours?"

The dame put her hands in her sides, and a diverting expression occupied her face.

"I was sorry to lose her," she said, "but she had to go."

"Why?" I demanded.

"She got so high. It lifted her out of herself. It did her no good, that London picture of her, I assure you."

"So she is gone? But tell me"—and I awaited her answer with real interest—"was she as pretty as the paper represented her?"

The lady's lips pursed. She had herself been not unprepossessing once upon a time.

"Pretty!" quoth she. "Well, now, I never thought so. She hadn't exactly an ill-looking face, but she had no size. She was quite a small person, you understand!"

Now, my landlady was a large person.

I took this reply with me to my dinner, which was ready. I digested it while I ate my landlady's stewed rabbit, turnips, and excellent cheese; and I came to the conclusion that the late Anna of Castleton could not but have been beautiful. Alas, though, that she should have grown "high" under the conviction thus coarsely driven home to her! And now she serves, I presume, somewhere else where her credential is by no means so potent on her or her employer's behalf.

Towards three o'clock, I started afresh from Castleton, and climbed up Cave Dale on to the moors at the back of the town. A charming little glen indeed is Cave Dale, with the limestone cliffs pressing it narrowly on either hand, and a soaring slope of turf between them.

But it was longer than I thought. When I broke on to the high ground, I must have been eight hundred feet or more above Castleton. It was clear weather here, and the view of the broad expanse of bleak fells, with Kinder Scout, Abney Moor, and other supreme elevations showing palely in the waning light—the view was not enlivening.

I had clambered into the west. The sun was setting right in my face, though with a murk of officious clouds before it. All was deathly still, not a breath of wind blew, and I saw no living thing in the comprehensive extent of my landscape.

It seemed to me that I might be belated on this moor, since I had no intention of returning as I had come to it. I therefore took my bearings scrupulously, and struck for the road through the Winnats. I passed a chilly, naked farmhouse—at this height—then a second, and then I trod into the road which has acquired a certain fame for its grandeur.

Perhaps the Winnats pass is over-praised. I know not, and care not. All I know is, that on this quiet Sunday evening it pleased me, with its bossy limestone pinnacles and its green sward between the various overhanging heights. There were crimson dashes in the sky above the pass, and this enhanced its grace. They say that when there is a storm from the south-west here, you have to fight for your passage up the pass. It is extremely probable. I have ere this had to strive not inconsiderably to move along Cheapside in the teeth of the wind.

After this little adventure, I took tea at my Castleton hotel like any old woman. Then I smoked and toyed with the three hotel cats, who seemed to like my society—and my cream-jug's—and read until the church bell near tinkled like the cracked thing it is.

Then to church I groped in the darkness. No lamp aided us worshippers, and there was no moon. There was much giggling from the natives in this approach to the church. I found myself in a high pew, with four young women who continued their giggling by my side.

Though not exactly reverend outside, this Castleton church is certainly a venerable building. I sat in its nave—it has no aisles—looking at as fine a Norman chancel arch as any in the country. It is small and white, and its Vicar—like so many other Vicars—gave us a moderate sermon with a bad delivery. I grieve to say my thoughts wandered during the sermon. My neighbours cracked nuts, and whispered, and giggled on. They also set their feet against the back of the pew in front of them in a way that displayed their ankles bountifully. Fie upon Castleton manners, methought!

There is a tablet on the wall which taught me as much as the sermon. It is to Micah Hall, who died in 1804, and styles himself—or some one else does it—"gentleman" and "attorney at law." His epitaph declares him to have been a sage:

What I was you know not;
What I am you know not;
Where I have gone you know not.
Farewell!

He has it in the Latin, but I guarantee my translation.

After the service I nearly broke my neck in stumbling into the roadway. Others, I imagine, nearly broke their necks; perhaps one or two actually did it.

Then I slid through the mud on my homeward—that is my Hopeward—way, and reached the inn just as the church clock chimed the half-hour. There was the usual row of solemn natives with their backs to the outer inn wall, this time betrayed, however, by the fiery glow of cigars in their mouths. I suppose they are the recognised illuminants of the place on Sunday evenings.

LIL; AND THE OTHERS.

A COMPLETE STORY.

A CAT was the cause of it all; a fact which Lil insisted was most peculiar, as she had always held the feline species in especial abhorrence.

The three girls, Lilies Maynard, Prue Palsgrave, and Mary Baldwin, kept house together, and a very pleasant home it was. The house belonged to Prue, who was the possessor of a handsome income, and her liberality enabled the other girls to live in a style to which they could otherwise have had no pretension. Both depended upon their own exertions; Mary as a teacher in the High School, Lil as a shorthand writer in a railway office. Prue was considerably older than her companions, who admired her for her extensive experience of life.

Prue, a woman of speculative and theoretical tendencies, was honestly devoted to Lil, and excessively jealous of any interference with her own influence. Lil, herself, was an impulsive young person, thirsting for everything that was sweetest in life, and feeling quite able to encounter Fate unassisted. She wanted her own delights and those of others; it came natural to her to grasp every rapture that earth possessed, and to absorb every variety of enchantment. The pretty, attractive girl had a passion for distinction; she felt that she ought to have been born a great poet, or artist, or musician, and considered that in denying her the attributes of genius, Nature had treated her unkindly. Prue's admiration flattered her vanity, and increased her own exalted estimation of her powers. Miss Maynard never quite understood how it was that she had developed into an "up-to-date" young woman, an oracle among her own set. In reality two important

factors had contributed to that effect—these were Prue and Brian Alison.

Prue was a tall, pale woman, with dark eyes that could flash and gleam. A sort of fervid eloquence and many genial arts of ingratiating rendered her interesting. It was understood among the girls that Prue had suffered "a disappointment," and had been the innocent victim of the cruel inconstancy of man. Miss Palsgrave made capital out of her sorrows, at which she hinted darkly, being far too clever to express clearly in words what could so much better be left to the imagination. A sigh of dolorous reminiscence marked pensive disapprobation, or hinted at aspiration or grievance. When courtship or marriage were alluded to, Prue looked sadly doubtful, and the girls insensibly imbibed vehement suspicions of the opposite sex.

Brian Alison, with his mother and younger brother Frank, were the next-door neighbours. Mrs. Alison entertained rigorous views; she considered that three young women living together, and enjoying themselves in freedom, were flying in the face of Providence. The three were steady as old Time, but they took a mischievous delight in shocking the old lady's prejudices. Mrs. Alison indemnified herself by enlarging to her sons upon the enormities committed by the girls; tirades to which Frank listened with amusement, and Brian with ill-concealed exasperation.

At one time Lil and Brian had been very good friends; perhaps they had even approached a closer and sweeter tie. Now they seemed to be antagonists who regarded each other with keenest interest, each having the power of wounding and humiliating the other. Mary Baldwin, who was disposed to make humorous comments upon the faults and foibles of others, wondered if Prue, in her persistent efforts to widen the breach, could be actuated by malice; in reality, Prue was inspired by motives of the purest affection. Was it not her place to save her friend from the wreckage which her own hopes had sustained? Mrs. Alison was devoted to her eldest son, and honestly desired to secure his happiness in the way her own imperious will had planned; she ardently seconded Miss Palsgrave's efforts to keep the young people apart.

Lil was a tender-hearted, wilful creature, swayed by sudden gusts of temper and feeling, subject to paroxysms of sentiment or enthusiasm, to silent, deep suppressions of feeling, one mood following another so

rapidly that it was difficult to know the real girl. With the sprightliness of high hopes and the perversity of youth, fighting among instincts and sensations which she scarcely understood, Lil neither realised nor appreciated the charm of Brian Alison's friendship until she had lost it. She fancied that it was due to her self-respect to show the young man how little value she attached to his attentions; she became provoking, defiant, capricious, treating him with a gay and tolerant indifference.

About the same time Brian began to cherish a conviction that his mother's views concerning the modern girl might be correct. When Prue met him walking with Marion Howard, who had been spending the evening with his mother, her lively imagination instantly fashioned a harrowing tale of deception and inconstancy. Lil listened with apparent coolness to the recital, which seemed so incredible in its inappropriateness as to fill her with indignant astonishment. Her pretty lips grew mutinous as a shock of angry feeling brought the blood to her face, but she remarked carelessly that that was exactly what she had expected; a sweet girl, without strongly marked individuality, would suit Brian Alison's ideal.

"Nonsense! I don't believe a word of it," Mary observed sensibly. "Marion and Brian Alison have never even been friends."

Lil's pride was up in arms; all the humiliations involved came gleaming across her mind at intervals. She was quite brilliant that night, and when the Alison brothers happened to drop in, she ventilated her most advanced opinions with a gay temerity that took away the young men's breath. A high superiority of experience was in her look. If her heart smarted and stung in her breast, no one should ever know it. Prue, also, proclaimed her sentiments with resentful severity.

To Mr. Alison the inference was not agreeable. He hesitated between the possibility of honest speech and the cowardice of silence.

"Then, according to your view, men and women are in open antagonism?" emphasizing the question by the urgency of his eyes.

"It is all nonsense," protested Mary, but Prue and Lil waxed so eloquent in defence of their sex, Brian was so deeply offended by the manifest discourtesy, Frank was so exceedingly diverted by the discussion, they all became so heated and confused that no one heeded the warning of common sense.

After that, Brian Alison's attentions to Marion became more apparent, or it might be that her efforts to attract him were more apparent. During this period of forlornness and disorganisation Lil registered a vow of perpetual celibacy. That sense of perplexity and falsehood, which is the most sickening of all sensations, rendered her denunciations of the opposite sex bitter and vehement. The future seemed so misty, and her own heart so languid, that she grasped eagerly at the first excitement that offered itself. Where her feelings were touched she had a certain fervour and sensibility that gave her eloquence. Her companions listened, charmed by her tirades, and a definite conviction shaped itself in their minds that a great future lay before her. This display of uncompromising rhetoric attracted attention; Lil began to shine in the girls' clubs. The first taste of applause gave extraordinary impulse to her convictions, and to the sting of wounded pride with which they were interwoven. Already in imagination she held forth before vast assemblies, and heard her own voice denouncing Man with a force that nothing could resist.

"You have taken to that style of literature," Mary pointed to a pile of books lying on the table before her friend. "This is what is termed '*fin du siècle*,' which simply means a double concentration of nastiness."

"I don't pretend to like it," Lil explained eagerly. "Sometimes it is horribly revolting; but in my position it seems necessary that I should understand all these questions of the day."

"Imagine any one who can walk on a clean pathway choosing to wade through mud. Ugh!"

Prue was ready to work with the wisdom of the serpent, and the meekness of a dove. She looked very important and full of her mission.

"Lil will be one of the women of her generation," she congratulated herself, with a sigh bracketted between two smiles. "There is nothing I despise so much as spying and eavesdropping, but I have not hesitated to sacrifice my own inclinations on her behalf. I may claim the credit of having saved her from marriage with a man who is incapable of appreciating her rare qualities."

No furtive or painful doubt occasioned even a momentary tremor of conscience.

"I am not so sure about that," Mary Baldwin responded, with a slightly ironical smile of adverse criticism.

Prue's face fell abruptly into shades of disapproval and impatience, as holding out a prohibitory hand she spoke with indignant inflection.

"Lil is the creature dearest to me in all the world; I would do anything for her."

"Except allow her to be happy in a natural way."

Miss Palsgrave concluded that she had never really been very fond of Mary, and now she downright disliked her.

Prue's ambition was to see her friend a leader among women. The idea hovered in her mind as an enticing possibility that Lil might actually become famous. Under the influence of these indefinite pleasures of the imagination, Prue's thoughts leaped forward to meet the future, and then paused, not from any indecision, but because attractive ideas, far too numerous to grasp, floated past. Miss Palsgrave was effusively affectionate to the heroine of her fancy, but the young girl did not receive these demonstrations with the fervour due to a friend who displayed so beneficent an interest.

It happened that Mary Baldwin had been away on her vacations. The train having been delayed, she arrived at home later than she had expected. The three girls sat chattering over the supper-table until it was very late. A cat, deserted by its protectors, who had gone out of town for the summer, and not finding the charity of an unfeeling world to its taste, had resolved to establish itself in comfortable quarters beneath Prue's hospitable roof; this not unnatural desire had been strenuously resisted, as the occupants of the cottage all disliked cats. At the present juncture, this dejected animal had established itself upon a small shed just below the dining-room window. Hearing the sounds of festivity within, it gave expression to its outraged feelings by clawing wildly at the wooden blinds that rattled at its touch.

Mrs. Alison was a light sleeper. She was awakened by the rattling of blinds; she fancied that she heard the shivering of glass; her imagination promptly supplied all the adjuncts of the situation. Burglars were certainly breaking into the next house. The old lady paused to assure herself that she could never conscientiously approve of those girls, still she could not allow defenceless creatures to be murdered in their beds for want of a word of warning. Brian must immediately telephone to the police, but she should herself hold all the threads of the situation in her own hands. She had no

desire to see her staid, sensible son bewitched again just as he was recovering from that momentary infatuation.

Like many another, Mrs. Alison experienced a wide diversity between theory and practice. She awakened Brian, informing him of the danger with which their neighbours were threatened. She had made no allowance for the young man's impetuosity. Before his mother could explain how she meant to initiate the cautious preliminaries, he had telephoned, dressed, and was in close conference with two policemen and a sergeant who had arrived in answer to his summons. There had recently been several burglaries in that quarter of the city, and as the perpetrators of the crime had not been discovered, the newspapers had been loud in their denunciations of the inefficiency of the police. A plan of attack was quickly concerted. Brian was to ring Miss Palsgrave's front-door bell, in order to startle the thieves, who, it was supposed, would promptly strive to escape by the back premises, where the policemen would be stationed to catch them as they came out from the house.

The night was sultry. As Prue was about to retire she was tempted out on to her back gallery. She fancied that she heard stealthy footsteps, cautious whispers; surely she could not be mistaken? Dark forms seemed to be creeping through the Alisons' yard. Then a vivid flash from a dark lantern betrayed the fact that one man was actually scaling the fence, while his companions were preparing to follow. A succession of appalling shrieks cleft the night air as Miss Palsgrave realised the terror of the situation. Mrs. Alison, an interested spectator, was stationed on her back gallery. If these girls had slighted Brian, he was ready to throw coals of fire upon their heads.

"Pray don't be alarmed, Miss Palsgrave, my son is here to protect you; calm yourself," with a growing insistence in her voice, as surprise at Prue's energetic outcry gradually developed into consternation. "It is only the police—I thought these emancipated women were supposed to have more courage than men. Dear Miss Palsgrave, let me beg of you to control yourself. Oh," losing temper and patience, "oh, for goodness' sake, be quiet!"

"Prue, be still, and let us hear what all this commotion is about," pleaded Mary Baldwin, as a loud ring of the bell echoed through the house.

Poor Prue had no longer power to control

her tingling nerves; a series of hysterical cries broke from her lips, frightening Mrs. Alison more than the advent of the expected burglars, and exasperating the police, who were bent upon achieving glory by a clever capture. The quiet street was aroused by the noise, windows were thrown open, drowsy voices were heard demanding explanations.

"Prue, if you won't be reasonable I shall have to shake you, or throw cold water over you to bring you to your senses." Mary, grim and resolute, towered over her friend. "See, here I have the pitcher ready."

It was Lil who answered Brian Alison's summons.

"Burglars," he began excitedly, then hesitated and faltered, as his heart leapt up into excited throbbing. Lil was startled and confused; she had lost her fictitious air of dominance and energy. She could not speak, but silently held out her hands to her old friend; the mute, spontaneous gesture of appeal touched the young man, who had been disposed to stand upon his dignity; a new light, opening out a perfect heaven of hope and blessedness, dawned upon his intelligence, and flashed in a smile over his face; he grasped both the little shaking hands in his.

"I am come to take care of you." His voice brought an element of softness and comfort to the girl.

"I thought you did not care—I was so miserable—I wanted you so."

Here the dialogue became exceedingly inarticulate. Lil's pride broke down. Her soul was awake, quivering with consciousness; womanhood had come with a purity and beauty beyond any possibility of girlhood. With question and answer of sweet reconciliation, those were blissful moments in the dimly lighted hall. It is difficult to tell how long this joyful epoch might have lasted, had not the intrusion of Mary Baldwin and the three policemen brought it to an abrupt termination.

"Have they passed this way, sir? We have found no trace of them. What shall we do next?" The gallant defenders of the peace still panted to attain distinction.

"Have you found the robbers?" inquired Mary anxiously.

The lovers, doubtful and confused, stood far apart. Lil's eyes were enlarged by the moisture shining in them, Brian was radiant with the dazzle and flash of triumph. Mary, who understood the silent language of the soul, smiled as she interposed between the astonished strangers and her friends.

"You never heard poor Prue's hysterics,

and you both have forgotten about catching the burglar," she said in her friendly Scotch voice. "Perhaps, after all, it was the best thing you could do."

IN A DRURY LANE COURT.

MIX is not a popular calling, and those who practise it can hardly be expected to see the best side of human nature. And yet, hardened as we are supposed to be, I must own to having been not a little impressed by the effect the late festive season had on the small group of dwellings where my unwelcome appearances are periodically made.

It would be hard to imagine greater poverty and destitution of all the common comforts of life than is the daily lot of the tenants who throng my court. Two rows of tall houses, where each room is crowded with inhabitants, are divided from each other by a narrow flagged alley where the children play and the costers' carts are crowded together when work is over.

For most of the tenants belong to the class of which Mr. Chevalier has constituted himself the sentimental Laureate, and the rest are Covent Garden porters, flower-girls, cobblers, and scavengers. A few of the women sew at Government work; some of the girls are dancers; and very many are out of work, and spend their days in looking for it hopefully.

I was warned at starting that the people in Crew's Court were a rough lot, and a certain rosy, smiling maker of sweet-stuffs, who rented one room and sub-let it to two other tenants, was pointed out to me as "the lady who knew how to settle the rent collectors." Even the policeman on duty in the Lane gave me a kindly warning the first day I turned in under the low-browed entry with a public-house on each side, and told me that the last man had nearly lost his eyesight from the furious attack of a defaulting tenant. But even then, without much ground on which to build it, I had a fixed belief that amongst such forlorn beings as these, there was more good than evil to be found if one but knew the way to get at it. I knew that, although in entering these miserable homes, where the very poor were huddled together so comfortlessly, I could hope for no welcome, yet that, as representing the landlord, I had a powerful hold upon them which might, in kindly hands, be used for good.

For, incredible as it must seem, the

tenants cling to their tenements with a tenacity which shows how increasingly hard it is for the very poor to get low-priced rooms in a central part of London. Foul, dirty, and grimy as the Court was, I have known women sob and cry as they begged to be allowed to take a room in it. Once there, there were few points they would not yield, and no promise they would not make, for the sake of being permitted to stop. They have been known to give up drink; to have their children baptised; to join the savings bank; to turn over all manner of new leaves, morally and physically; just in order to stop in the wretched room that is near their work and suited to their means.

And there is something almost heroic in the efforts they will make to have the rent ready for me. Not once or thrice, but many and many a time have I entered an attic with sloping walls and low roof—like the abode of Hogarth's "distrest poet"—and found it neat and clean, and quite bare; the young mother striving to still the children's hungry cries, the cupboard empty, the children's boots pawned—but the rent-book and the weekly half-crown ready for me on the table.

"The children begged hard that I would spend the odd coppers on some breakfast for them, sir, but I daren't run the risk of losing my little 'ome. So take it, sir, do, and maybe Bill might get a job to-day, and I could give a trifle towards the back rent next week."

Or I have found another room so full of strawberry baskets that I have scarce seen the heads of the man and his wife and son over the great heap. They cannot stop in their busy plaiting and twisting even to look up, but tell me they got an order last evening, and have sat up all night to complete it. Will I wait till the man has taken his work round to the Market and he will hand me over every penny, "he will, faithful, though we haven't a crust in the house;" and it is my hard duty to take it, without looking at the wan face of the woman or the bitter misery of the man, for had it not been forthcoming they must have been turned out, and one of the eight-and-twenty applicants would have succeeded to the room with the blackened ceiling, the broken floor, and the rag-stuffed window. But when I returned to claim the hard-earned shillings, I was cheered to find the mournful trio sitting among their shavings and thoroughly enjoying some cocoa and cake, hastily fetched from an eating-house

in the Lane by the woman in the next room—my most depraved and troublesome tenant—who informed me shrilly that she thought that a better way of spending nine-pence than paying off her own back rent.

Charity, forbearance, and a wonderful power of making the best of it are the striking characteristics of these poor creatures. It is a truism to say that the very poor are often heroic in their kindness to each other, but few people realise the sufferings which such close neighbourhood entails on the weak and the sensitive. A drunken tenant above, a howling baby below, a horrible smell all over the house, the continual failure of any water supply, the vermin in summer, and the piercing cold and mud of winter are all taken bravely, or put aside with "We must take it as it comes—mustn't we, sir? It don't do to be too particular, do it?" And the patience and good-humour with which the children are almost invariably treated is truly a thing to wonder at.

There are dirty rooms where a four-post bedstead, bereft of all mattresses and bed-clothes, is absolutely the sole article of furniture. And in such rooms I have known a widowed charwoman lock up her two young children, with two pieces of stale bread for the long working day when she was out.

"They learns bad words if I leaves them to play in the court with them low children," she says augustly, when I gently remonstrate with her for this habit.

And there are rooms where the only seats are over-turned baskets, and a family of six have to manage as best they can with two small iron bedsteads. But the larger number of the rooms have some attempts at ornament. The apple of a housekeeper's eye in this locality is her collection of glass and china, generally cracked, and always hideous, which she keeps crowded dangerously together on the only clear space in the whole room—the top of the chest of drawers. It seems a sort of fetish, useless and dreadfully in the way; but one of my tenants, whose fiery-tempered, drunken husband had beaten and maimed and cruelly ill-used her in every way, clung to him with pathetic devotion, and slaved at hawking vegetables to maintain him, till the day when he came home and "battered" all the glass and china with a thick stick. She quietly put on her big shawl and black bonnet, turned her apron inside out, and walked down the court, only stopping to kiss the blind baby, who was every one's

pet. Neither her husband nor I have seen her since, but the matrons of the Court "admire her spirit," and taunt her dejected relict, now doomed to sell groundsel in bare feet, "because he could not keep his hands off a lady's good crockery."

I have charge of another Court in the City—a queer old corner wedged in amongst great warehouses close by London Wall, and the thoroughly pampered condition of my tenants there at Christmas time made me hope that, in some way, good luck had brightened Crew's Court also. In Blue Anchor Yard, the lucky tenants had more loads of coal, warm blankets, and Christmas bounties from the City churches and City charities, than they could possibly use themselves; but no assistance from without came to gladden the poor inhabitants of my Drury Lane court.

The thought of those eighty cheerless rooms came between me and my own Christmas enjoyments, and, feeling sure after months of kindly intercourse that I would not be ill received, I ventured on visiting my poor friends in the course of the evening, un-bidden and expected though I was.

Amongst all the poor little homes so precariously held, and so sparsely furnished, there were not more than three where decoration, festivity, and rejoicing of some sort did not change the aspect of the sordid scene, and touch the heart with the deep pathos of such merry-making. In the window of one woman whose husband was dead, and whose boys kept the house by making toy grates and saucepans, a Christmas-tree was being lit to the boundless joy of the children who watched from other windows in the Court. It looked very gay and glittering, and at that distance presented as brave an appearance as many a costly one for the children of the rich; but when at the eager invitation of the cripple boy I went up to see it nearer, I found that the pink muslin bags of sweets, the tinsel toys and tin stars, could not have cost a shilling at the very outside. But to see that widow's children clap their hands, and to hear their shrill delight, was well worth my long walk in the mist and rain. That room, like all the others, was elaborately adorned with festoons of coloured paper made in links, and the long chains radiated from a tin star in the centre of the ceiling. Some "Christmas," as they all call the holly, was stuck in the picture-frames, and even over the rows of funeral cards which are the proudest boast of a Drury Lane mantelpiece. They had all had pork

and plum-pudding, and there was to be "cake" for tea, and the fact that the soldier brother was lying hopelessly drunk in a corner in no wise detracted from the mirth of the great occasion. I had to drink some tea and taste some cake—when I see the viands these people subsist on, inferior in every respect and vilely cooked, I always wonder that the children nurtured on such fare ever grow into men and women—and we parted with "Merry Christmas and many of them" echoing as gaily down the rotten, rickety staircase as if life was all bliss to these half-starved folk.

How should I find the lonely old Bridget from Cork who "lived her lone" just below, I wondered, as I rapped at her door and heard a crooning noise. A good fire—made of a Covent Garden orange-box—lit her room and hid its dirt; a neighbour's child had festooned her room with yellow and blue paper; a short clay pipe and a twist of tobacco lay handy on the broken chair; a gaudy Christmas card from a granddaughter in service decked the mantelpiece, flanked by a bottle of porter; and Biddy sat on a basket rocking the baby who spent its days shut up in the empty room below, and telling an older child some rambling tale about how they hunted the wren "on Chrisamas Day—old Chrisamas Day—in the beautiful County of Cork."

Biddy had been to mass, and Biddy had resisted her besetting sin of a comforting glass just because the children's mother had begged her to take them in while she, in borrowed garments, went to eat her Christmas dinner with an old fellow-servant who was "that genteel" she must not know how ragged the children were, or how much they needed the scraps the poor mother would secrete for them at the table of her friend.

If "small cheer but great welcome make a merry feast," my Christmas Day was a festivity of unequalled enjoyment, for at each home I had the same kindly, genial greeting. Old sores—not unconnected with back rents, and bad coins, and wanton destruction of property—were tactfully forgotten and ignored. I must taste the best they had to offer, and admire their achievements in the way of brightening the cracked, discoloured walls and dingy windows. It made me sad to hear them apologetically offering explanations of these wild outbursts of extravagance.

"Well, sir, you see, my Polly she's gone fairy again at the Lane, and her screw will come in handy to pay for the bit of beef, and the nuts and oranges;" or,

"Dare say you wonders where I got it from, sir, and me had no rent last Tuesday; but don't you miss nothing out of the room? Grandfather's old clock, it's gone round the corner to find all this fine spread. But there, I couldn't disappoint them this one day. It would fair break their hearts, and it's but once in a way," and the mother would point to the crowd of children, whose large eyes seemed to devour the heavy plum cake that flanked the mug-covered tea-tray. Even the little printers' boys, whom I had never once seen clean, had washed off their smudges, and put on some limp collars. Even the old man with the ferocious voice who grubbed for primrose roots "down Surrey way," and had such trouble in pacifying suspicious keepers, had bidden another old gentleman—a sweep without incumbrance—to share his gin and tobacco in the damp and mouldy lair where his unsold ferns and roots lay dying, and I heard them as I entered talking quite amiably over the horrors of a murder in "Lloyd's News." Even the virago who had "nearly done for" my luckless predecessor had—before she got locked up for drunkenness—made a whole tray of sticky brown sweets and handed them out to the children of the Court; and the cobbler's wife was spending her Christmas by mounting guard over poor Janey's children, and filling the baby's bottle with the milk she had put away for her own "man's" tea.

The coster lad of seventeen, who had married a flower-girl of fifteen a week since, had no Christmas dinner, it is true, for Molly's lovely narcissus flowers from Scilly had not found purchasers after two days in her close garret. They lay, a fragrant fading mass, under the bed. The cupboard was bare, the fire was out—for there was no more coal—but the young thriftless couple were so foolishly happy in their youth, and love, and poverty, that I had not the heart to shake the head of prudence at them as I purchased the stock of flowers, and saw Molly's Irish eyes grow dim with tears of joy when I sent her off for food and fire.

AN UNPRINCIPLED WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

"A WOMAN without any position in the parish! A visitor!—really, it is intolerable!"

The street was suburban, and the garments of the speaker and of her companion were suburban also. The two had come forth from the house at which they had

been calling in an expressive silence, broken, as they found themselves on the damp pavement in the half-foggy November twilight, by the above indignant words.

"I don't consider that position would excuse Mrs. Cotgreave in the least," was the biting response.

"How any one can possibly be so blind! The most excellent man that ever lived!" Then with a sudden change of tone: "Have you thought him looking quite himself lately, Miss Adams?"

Miss Adams shook her head.

"Very far from it," she said. "Yesterday, at the ladies' Bible class, he looked absolutely haggard. He is worried; that is the cause. The spirit of opposition engendered by Mrs. Cotgreave is a continual distress to him! I consider her an absolutely unprincipled woman."

The person thus disposed of was standing at that moment warming one foot on the fender in the drawing-room which the two ladies had just left. She was a tall woman, clad in a tailor-made tweed dress cut by no dressmaker known to the suburbs. Even about her pose there was a vigorous freedom and self-confidence, as she stood, her skirt a little lifted and held back, glancing carelessly over her shoulder towards the other occupant of the room—a large and placid-looking woman, who sat by the tea-table. Her face was dark and well-featured, full of quick humour and vivid, uncompromising force.

Magdalen Cotgreave was not a suburban production. She had married, as an unusually clever girl of six-and-twenty; and she had spent the six years of her not very satisfactory married life in various Continental capitals. She had friends all over Europe in every rank of society, and when, after two years of widowhood, she arranged to spend some time in the household of one of her brothers, every reason for the step was assigned by every creature by whom it was discussed, except the right one; namely, that her brother was not well off, and it had occurred to Mrs. Cotgreave that a sharer in the expenses of his house-keeping would be a not unwelcome addition to his family.

Magdalen Cotgreave had been in the habit of creating interest and entertainment for herself out of any surroundings among which she happened to find herself, and she had made no doubt of finding both in the life of her brother's neighbourhood. She was a born leader—if not of the government, then of the opposition; and the

government, in the sphere in which she now found herself, being already amply provided for, her position was obviously preordained. Her activity in that position, and her appreciation of the situation after six months' trial of it, was being set forth by her now to her sister-in-law, as it had frequently been set forth before, in terse and decisive but not unmusical speech.

"This is not a neighbourhood," she was saying; "it's not a 'set' even! It's a parish! Its every notion is parochially bounded. My dear Agnes, have you a single idea in life beyond your duty to your husband and your duty to your Vicar? I know it's a joy to you, and to all the other ridiculous women, to hang on Mr. Marvin's words and obey his lightest nod, and I know it's a joy to him to receive your reverent adoration. But how the process can delight Heaven I altogether fail to understand."

"I wish you wouldn't say things like that, Magdalen, dear," answered Mrs. Haldane placidly. "Of course, I know clever people always have odd ideas, but it sets a bad example. That horrid Mrs. Smithson wasn't talking at all nicely about the Vicar yesterday. And by-the-bye, Magdalen, she was saying that you said that his little boys were at a very cheap school, and that it was very odd."

A brusque exclamation broke from Mrs. Cotgreave, and she turned sharply.

"Really, Agnes," she said, "I think you might know better. I detest gossip. Your horrid Mrs. Smithson gave me the piece of information you have repeated, two days ago, and it did not interest me in the least—as I told her."

Mrs. Haldane hastened to reply deprecatingly.

"Of course!" she said. "I knew there must be a mistake somewhere. Only you see it is really so very distressing to us all to have the dear Vicar talked about like that!"

She rose as she spoke to look for something on the writing-table, and in a moment or two she appealed to her sister-in-law.

"Magdalen," she said, "where did you put the charity account-book?"

Parish account-books were by no means uncommon objects in the Haldanes' house. Mr. Haldane was the Reverend Paul Marvin's churchwarden, and undertook the parish accounts. But the question had more effect upon Mrs. Cotgreave than the ordinary nature of its subject seemed to warrant. She moved abruptly, so that her face was

invisible to Mrs. Haldane. Then she raised her head abruptly.

"It's in my room," she said. "I'll get it for you." She crossed the room with a quick, characteristic step; but with her hand upon the door she paused. "Agnes," she said brusquely, "do not tell Mr. Marvin that I did the account for Richard. I don't wish him to know it."

Nearly ten minutes had passed when she came down again, and as she drew near the drawing-room door the sound of voices—one of them a man's voice—was audible. Mrs. Cotgreave's brows contracted sharply, and she opened the door and went in.

The Reverend Paul Marvin was sitting in the most comfortable chair the room afforded, drawn up to the fire in his honour. He was a tall man, with a powerful, well-made figure, conspicuous for an air of restless energy or vitality, which dominated even his present attitude of luxurious repose. The same air was perhaps the first characteristic which struck an observer of his handsome features, and in his face it produced an expression of authority and assurance. His eyes were very pleasant; kindly and keen, and absolutely direct in their gaze. If there were lines about his mouth and nose eminently suggestive of superciliousness and vanity, it needed more penetration than was possessed by the majority of his parishioners to detect them.

He was speaking to Mrs. Haldane as Mrs. Cotgreave came in; and though he deliberately finished his sentence as he rose, his full, mellow, slightly dictatorial voice became a trifle stiff and constrained. Mrs. Cotgreave crossed the room, laying the book she carried upon the writing-table as she passed, with a quick glance at her sister-in-law.

"How do you do?" she said carelessly. "Resting from your labours, Mr. Marvin?"

Mr. Marvin did not resume his seat. He turned to Mrs. Haldane.

"I have indeed had a delightful little rest," he said, with a pleasant smile; "but I'm afraid I must not prolong it. May I have those account-books, Mrs. Haldane? There is work waiting for me at home, I'm sorry to say!"

"There is always work waiting for you somewhere!" said Mrs. Haldane admiringly. "How is the school fund getting on, by-the-bye? Are the subscriptions coming in well?"

The Reverend Paul Marvin made a gesture of gratified assent.

"Fairly!" he said. "Yes, fairly. As

to the work, my dear Mrs. Haldane, no work would seem severe to me that availed to keep the education of the children of my parish under the control which alone should regulate it."

"That means your own control, of course?" Mrs. Cotgreave's eyes were fixed full upon him with something almost unmerciful in the directness of their gaze. Turning instinctively at the sound of her voice Paul Marvin met them, and into his own there flashed involuntarily an expression at once of defiance and antagonism.

"As the humble representative in this parish of the authority of the Church, yes, Mrs. Cotgreave!" he said.

"You don't understand these things, Magdalen," said Mrs. Haldane, in a tone of almost active reproof. And the Reverend Paul Marvin turned to her at once.

"I think Mrs. Cotgreave does not wish to understand them," he said, in slightly satirical tone. "She considers them beneath her! Good-bye, Mrs. Haldane! My kindest thoughts to the good husband. Good-bye, Mrs. Cotgreave. Can you deign to shake hands with me?"

Two minutes later he was going down the steps into the street.

Long before he reached his own door, Paul Marvin's face had changed extraordinarily. Its vigorous vivacity disappeared before a certain heavy concentration of thought. Once only was its sombre absorption broken; and then it was the look of defiance and antagonism with which he had met Mrs. Cotgreave's eyes, that leapt up in every feature as his fingers closed like a vice round the account-books he carried.

Arrived at the Vicarage, he let himself in and went straight to his study. Two letters, unopened, lay upon his table. He flung himself into his writing-table chair and sat there staring at them.

The word of the Reverend Paul Marvin was law to an overwhelming proportion of his parish of twelve hundred odd souls. He had the primary gift of eloquence; he had the power of organisation which often goes with a vigorous and restless temperament; he had a strong and dominating personality. The five years during which he had held his present living had raised him to the position of spiritual and social autocrat, adored by the vast majority, respected, and perhaps feared, even, by the minority by whom he was not adored. If such a position has its dangers; if the man who occupies it stands in need of some

counteracting influence at once tender and clear-sighted, it was not in his own home that any such an influence met Paul Marvin. His wife was a querulous, weak-minded woman, wholly incapacitated by hysteria from fulfilling any of the duties of life. Even the care of their two little boys was more than she considered herself equal to; and they had been sent, as little more than babies, to school in the country. Paul Marvin had no domestic life. He lived in public, in the life of the parish.

The house was very still. As he sat there, looking down on the topmost of the two unopened letters, there was not the faintest sound to be heard. At last he moved. He stretched out one hand, took up the letter, and opened it.

"DEAR MR. MARVIN," it ran,—*"I am exceedingly sorry to have to point out that no notice whatever has been taken of my last letter to you. I am reluctantly compelled to tell you that unless the cheque, so long over-due, reaches me in the course of twenty-four hours, I shall resign to you the charge with which you have entrusted me, and place the matter in the hands of my solicitor.*

Faithfully yours,

"JOHN HERIOT."

A heavy breath parted Paul Marvin's lips, and he moved them a little to moisten them. Then he let his hand fall slowly on to the table, crushing the letter.

"What am I to do?" he said in a low voice.

Moments passed, and he did not stir. Then he moved mechanically and took up the other letter. There was an enclosure, and as mechanically he held it as he read:

"DEAR SIR,—I enclose a cheque for one hundred pounds towards your school subscription. Kindly allow me to appear anonymously on your subscription list. I do not intend to create a precedent.

"Faithfully yours,

"PHILIP ALLARDYCE."

CHAPTER II.

"You look portentously well employed, Richard. I think, after all, I had better not apologise for having kept you up."

Nearly two months had passed. Mrs. Cotgreave had been dining out; her brother had waited to receive her, and he was sitting at the table before a businesslike array of papers.

He looked up as she came in, lifting a rather heavy face.

"You needn't apologise, certainly, Magdalen," he said. "I was very glad of an opportunity to get this done. It's the draft of the balance-sheet for the school fund."

A little smile of half interest touched her face, and she held out her hand.

"May I look?" she said.

Her brother glanced up. Then he put a sheet of paper into her hand.

"Not particularly interesting to you, I'm afraid!" he said.

She shook her head, still with that little smile, as she glanced down the paper. Then she lifted her head.

"I thought a balance-sheet represented all the in-comings and out-goings for the year!" she asked.

"This one only dates from July," he answered. "The fund wasn't opened until then. It represents the out-goings and in-comings from July to December."

Mrs. Cotgreave made no reply. She was studying the paper intently, and the smile had disappeared from her face.

"There are not many people who wish to conceal their good deeds!" she said at last; "only two anonymous subscribers—one fifty pounds, one ten. I suppose you don't know who either of the donors are, Richard?"

Mr. Haldane laughed.

"Oh, yes, I do," he said. "Mrs. Grace gave the fifty pounds, and old Miss Newton the tenner."

"Are you quite sure?"

The exclamation broke from Mrs. Cotgreave sharply and abruptly.

"I'm quite sure," was the answer. "Now if you wanted to do me a good turn, you'd offer to go through the pass-book with me and tick the entries off. But I expect you're tired!"

To his vague surprise Mrs. Cotgreave turned to him instantly, throwing off her wraps brusquely.

"I'm not in the least tired," she said. "Make haste, Richard. You take the paper, and I'll read out the entries in the book."

It was not a long task, even though, saying that she had lost the place, she made him go twice through the receipts for November and December. And at the end she pushed her chair back sharply, and stood up.

"You were quite right!" she said rapidly. "No mistake anywhere! Good night, Richard!"

And the next moment she was gone.

During the two days that followed, Mrs.

Haldane went the length not only of deciding that her sister-in-law "felt the cold," but of further communing with herself as to whether Mrs. Cotgreave were not on the verge of a serious illness. Mrs. Cotgreave's temper and general demeanour were, indeed, such as to require some accounting for. They varied, almost from hour to hour, between such brusqueness as was almost acerbity, and an absent-minded depression in which nothing seemed to interest her. She spent more time than usual in her own room, flatly and fiercely refusing to attend one of the Vicarage working parties, which had hitherto been a source of the greatest entertainment to her.

But it was to the Vicarage, nevertheless, that Mrs. Cotgreave proceeded on the third morning. She was looking very pale, even a trifle haggard; and there was a sunken look, suggestive of want of sleep, about her eyes. Her inquiry for Mr. Marvin received a smiling assent, and she followed the servant across the hall.

For an instant, as his eyes fell upon her, a singular flash of expression passed across Paul Marvin's face. Then without a moment's hesitation he advanced, holding out his hand.

"Mrs. Cotgreave!" he exclaimed. "This is indeed an unexpected pleasure. Is it possible that I can have the honour of being of any service to you?"

His tone was rather curious. As though the momentary shock of her appearance had slightly disturbed his balance, its expression seemed to be in abeyance, to await developments, as it were. But if his demeanour was not quite usual, Mrs. Cotgreave was still more unlike herself. She had turned white to the very lips, and the strong lines of her face were relaxed as with a nervousness hardly to be controlled. She did not speak, and Paul Marvin's quick eyes took in the signs of her unusual agitation almost before his own words were uttered. His expression developed. It grew firm and rather hard, as with a grateful sense of superiority.

"Let me turn the chair to the fire for you," he went on, ignoring her silence and giving her time to recover herself with a pleasantness of manner which was not without its touch of patronage. "It is cold, isn't it? There!"—as she seated herself mechanically—"I flatter myself that is rather a nice chair. Mrs. Haldane is quite well, I hope, and your brother? Now," he said, "what can I do for you, Mrs. Cotgreave?"

position. Comfortable and reliable private asylums for elderly ladies thus afflicted are by no means unimportant items of expenditure. That my parishioners should be kind enough in their estimate of my private income—or rather my wife's income—to increase it by one-third, was perhaps hardly my fault; and I have not considered it desirable to create gossip by practising economy, either in my household arrangements or in my private charities, as being incompatible with their theories.

Magdalen Colgreave made a

She was looking straight before

as it seemed, directly and

at the mental picture his

he had uttered it—

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CONDUCTED BY
CHARLES DICKENS.

THIRD SERIES.

SATURDAY, MARCH 30, 1895.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

RICHENDA.

By MARGARET MOULE.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SIR RODERICK GRAEME was alone in the smoking-room of his flat. The absence of his fellow owner had developed into an unexpected journey to South Africa, which "had brought his share in the joint household keeping to an end. And Sir Roderick's own tenancy was almost at an end also. Only three days of it remained to him. In three days he was going to leave everything that had hitherto made up his life, and to begin a new life, on wholly new lines, by himself, in Queensland.

Very rarely indeed had Sir Roderick's "set" had so interesting a topic on which to speculate as that afforded them by this unexpected departure. When Sir Roderick first announced his intention to his friends he became, forthwith, a sort of nine days' wonder, to be discussed incessantly. His men friends decided with unanimity that Sir Roderick must be "short of cash" to a serious extent, and preferred this desperate step to the announcement of that fact. The women who knew him preferred a less prosaic theory. He must, they reasoned, have had some sort of "disappointment." But when, following classic advice, they proceeded to "look for the woman," no woman presented herself to their minds as the heroine of Sir Roderick's romance. He knew and was known to many girls and women; but not one could be singled out as having been lately distinguished by any special attention on his part. Nevertheless, they, in the absence of any other, held firmly to their theory.

Questions without end had been addressed to Sir Roderick on the subject. To each and all he had one simple answer. He thought he "would try a change," he said. And nothing more was to be extracted from him.

Even if Sir Roderick had been willing, he might have found it difficult to supply his friends with his reason. For though this was very firmly established in his own mind, it would not easily have allowed itself to be reduced to words. It would not have been easy to explain that he was going to Queensland because the world, and everything in it, had been turned to dust and ashes for him by the change it had brought about in Richenda Leicester.

Since the August evening, now nearly eight months ago, when he had set himself to work to decide finally, whether he should or should not ask Richenda Leicester to be his wife, Sir Roderick's mental and moral perceptions had been ground into a new sensitiveness by a relentlessly grinding mill.

He had made his decision, and once made it had brought him a keen sense of hitherto unknown happiness. He had not gone to bed at all on that August night for thinking of the future that lay, as he hoped, before Richenda and himself. His scruples as to marrying out of his own "set," when once overcome, were banished wholly. In the reaction that followed them, he only wondered how he could ever have cherished any such scruples.

He had set forth, on the following afternoon, in as much hope as it is possible for a modest man to know, to plead his cause with Richenda. He had come away, bewildered, angry with himself, and sobered by an unavailing and hopeless regret. For the shock that awaited him, in the news

of Richenda's fortune, he had been, naturally, so utterly unprepared, that, at first, the mere announcement itself overwhelmed him. It was some time before he could even realise the fact which Richenda imparted to him.

But directly he did realise it, he realised also that he was too late. In the wild whirl of his thoughts, that was the only thing he could understand. How could he propose to her now? he said to himself bitterly. The girl to whom he had gone, intending to offer her, together with himself, all the advantages of position, money, and freedom from anxiety, was a rich woman now, who could provide herself with all these things; who could place at her feet the world into which he had intended to lead her as his wife. He had stood aloof from her in her poverty and her obscurity; he had felt something like contempt for her position when he might have altered it for her; and now, she was out of his reach, and he could do nothing to bring her back. He had been reluctant to show to the nurse any sign of what he had felt for her; he certainly could not now claim the heiress. He had lost his opportunity—lost it for ever. As he took his departure from the red-brick villa, the thought haunted him with a bitter persistency that did not lessen during the days that followed.

It was to hide from the eyes of his friends his bewilderment, his self-condemnation, and his shattered castles in the air, that he hurried on, by many days, his departure from town for Scotland. There, on his own estate, he had spent the autumn with scarcely a single guest to break the monotony of his days; and he had, later, amazed his factor by proposing, for the first time since he had been in possession, to spend Christmas in his own house, and alone. Throughout every one of his lonely days and weeks, his thoughts had been full of Richenda. He was not one iota less in love with her. He had come away from the red-brick villa loving her more than ever, and longing a thousand times more to have her for his own, now that she was so hopelessly out of his reach. And love and longing increased daily in intensity during his self-chosen exile.

He took care, during those months, to keep himself, indirectly, informed of Richenda's doings. But there came a day when second-hand accounts of her availed him not at all. He felt, all at once, that he must at least see her, from whatever

distance it might be, for himself, once more. So, with scant announcement of his intention, he left Scotland and returned to London. Among the letters he found awaiting him on his arrival, was an invitation from Richenda herself to an evening "at home." It was not the first communication he had received from her. More than one invitation had followed him to Scotland, to be successively declined in Sir Roderick's stiffest writing and phraseology. But he answered this one in the affirmative. He decided that it was in her daily surroundings he would first see again for himself the girl who held, for all time, his heart in her keeping.

On that night he received a shock even more severe in its effect upon him than the announcement of Richenda's wealth had been. He found that the Richenda he had known had vanished as completely as if she had been a creation of his fancy.

He met, instead, a woman whose ways, manner, and appearance were all strange and unreal to him. The simple, innocent-minded girl he had known was changed into a perfect copy of the smart, frivolous women among whom his life had been spent. There was nothing distinctive about Richenda now. The girl of those days was utterly merged in the fashionable woman of these.

He had scarcely recovered from this shock when a greater one met him. He discovered that Fergus Kennaway filled the place in which he had once hoped to stand. And the thought that Richenda should have so altered and so deteriorated as to allow a man who had treated her as Kennaway had done, to claim her love, was the hardest blow of all to Sir Roderick.

He had gone to see Richenda on the following afternoon because he had been unable to believe his senses; because he wanted to learn for himself if his Richenda really had developed into the woman he had seen as his hostess. That call had assured him as fully as he needed, that the incredible was the true. And the mill of disillusionment had rolled round its hardest turn that day.

It never occurred to his simple mind to leave off loving Richenda. He did not blame her; he did not feel any resentment towards her; on the contrary, he loved her only more. His disappointment in her did not react at all on the image of her in his mind; it acted on him peculiarly, perhaps, but its immediate effect was to fill him with intense distaste for the men

and women who made up his world. All at once, his eyes seemed to be opened to all the worst faults and follies of the life he had always shared, his perceptions seemed preternaturally sensitive to its weaknesses. If, he argued, a short contact with his world could so transform the simplest, sweetest woman he had ever known, what must be the characters of the units who made up that world? Sir Roderick, who had never before analysed motive or action of man or woman, now looked into every detail of all the lives around him, and found them one and all unsatisfactory.

His only consolation in these days was Jack Leicester's friendship. The boy was "too young to be spoiled yet," he said. And it was to Jack he first confided a project that had occurred to him. He had felt, on the January day which brought him the definite announcement of Richenda's engagement to Fergus Kennaway, that he could bear no more of his present existence. He would go somewhere away from every one he had known—somewhere where he could be quite alone, and where he could spend his days in real, honest hard work in a life about which there could be no shadow of deception or pretence. So he took the necessary steps for establishing himself alone in Queensland.

He had arranged everything so that he should be out of England before Richenda's wedding-day. And he had looked forward to his departure with a certain grim contentment.

Out of this he had been rudely shaken by Jack's story, and Jack's appeal for his help. All his great love for Richenda had seemed to surge into passion as he thought of her as suffering, and deceived. He never once thought, as he helped Jack throughout the details of proving Fergus Kennaway guilty, that it was just and right that she—the woman who had so disappointed him—should be herself tortured on the same rack. He never felt himself avenged; he never triumphed. He only felt an intense love and the tenderest pity, which culminated on the day when he stood before her, to find her white, helpless, and crushed with wounded pride, while he confirmed Jack in his tidings.

It was a fortnight now since that day, and he had seen nothing of Richenda, of course, during that time. He had questioned Jack sedulously about her, and had received always the same answer: "She's awfully wretched, but she won't say so, or let me say so."

He would have given all he was worth for the right to avenge Richenda. But he had no shadow of such a right, and he had had to content himself with cutting Kennaway openly and ostentatiously. He was thinking now, as he sat alone in his room, as he had thought in every hour of every day of the last fortnight—of Richenda. But he was not thinking now of her unhappiness only; he was wondering how he could get through what lay immediately before him—the task of saying good-bye to her. He had ended almost every one of his preparations for departure now, even to the burning of his old letters and memoranda, whose fragments lay in confusion round him at this moment; and all his farewell calls were paid, save two: a good-bye visit he had promised to make to the nursery at Bryanston Street, and his good-bye to Richenda.

It was four o'clock and more, and he ought, he knew, to have set forth half an hour ago. This was his only opportunity of carrying out his intention of seeing Richenda face to face for the last time; the two following days were filled to the utmost with business engagements.

Over and over again he had tried to rouse himself, and failed. He could not bring himself to take this last step of renunciation. Richenda was not ever to be his; and yet he could not bear finally to cut the feeble link of propinquity that held them together. The clock on the mantelpiece ticked on and on resonantly. Sir Roderick stared at it blankly. At length, as it struck the half-hour he started up hastily.

"I shall never do it, if I stay thinking any longer," he said. "I'll go and get the children over first, and then—I'll do it!"

CHAPTER XXV.

"We've got a dreadful lot of sorries, now!"

It was an hour later, and Sir Roderick and the Fitzgerald children, having just ended their farewell tea together, were sitting in the Bryanston Street nursery. The exclamation was Veronica's; and it was accompanied by a heavy sigh.

"What's the matter, pray?"

"You know—at least you know you're going. And that's a very greatest sorry!"

Veronica's sigh here received a heartfelt echo from Brian and Dolly.

"Then," she went on, in a piteous small voice, "we've not seen Darling for ever and

ever so long! She doesn't never ask us to lunch, now! And, then, it is so very unhappy that she's not going to have her marrying! Me and Dolly was going to be brides, and we had got such pretty frocks; blue, and bonnets! And Brian had got a white velvet suit for a page! And we can't wear them because Mr. Kennaway isn't going to do the marrying. Oh, godfather!" — Veronica had been sitting on half Sir Roderick's chair, with one arm round his neck. Now she jumped up, as if struck by a sudden idea. "Godfather dear!" she cried. "You always, always do what we ask you. Won't you do Darling's marrying instead of Mr. Kennaway? Then we could be brides and wear our frocks and Brian's suit! Oh, do, do, do!"

Veronica's last words became an eager scream. She was engrossed in her plan, and Sir Roderick's movement was so abrupt as to startle her greatly.

He rose hastily, and put the child down from him.

"Don't talk nonsense, Veronica!" he said, almost sharply. "Give me a kiss, all of you. I'm very busy, and I must go!"

With a puzzled sense that something "naughty" had been done by some one, and a still more puzzling sense of the general incomprehensibility of "grown-up" people, the children looked out of the nursery window to see Sir Roderick get into a passing hansom.

"It's the last time," he muttered to himself as, arrived at Miss Leicester's door, he tossed the cabman double his fare. "Neither he nor any one else on earth will ever drive me to her house again!"

It was a perfect spring evening. The trees in Kensington Gardens were plainly visible from where he stood, with their branches and twigs softened by the tinge of the coming green. The delicate tracery stood out against an evening sky, at the present a soft daffodil colour, with just a foretaste of the coming red of the sunset thrown across it by the lowering sun. There was the softness of spring in the air; that softness which, even in London, brings a sort of suggestion of warmth and hopefulness. But there was no echo, in poor Sir Roderick's mind, of any suggestion of hopefulness.

He was entering upon what was, to him, the most cruel and the most difficult duty that had placed itself before him in all his life. He gave an absolute sigh of relief when he found that the drawing-

room into which he was shown was empty, and that therefore a short respite was before him.

Richenda Leicester's drawing-room was looking its prettiest in the spring evening light; and the air was heavy and sweet with the scent of the spring flowers which were all about it.

But Sir Roderick scarcely cast one glance about him. The room was, for him, too full of the memory of that afternoon when Jack had brought him into it to meet Richenda in her misery. And he walked abruptly across it to a window, whence he was gazing with unseeing eyes at the people moving through the red sunlight in the road below, when the door of the ante-room opened with a little click. Sir Roderick turned sharply, just in time to face Miss Leicester as she put aside the curtains that draped the entrance to the larger room.

Richenda was very pale; indeed, it seemed as if no vestige of colour ever could come back to that dead white face. There were heavy dark shadows under her eyes, and the clear light showed that the beautiful eyes themselves were dim and heavy. She was wearing a thick, dark woollen dress, in which her slight form seemed even slenderer than was its wont.

"It is very good of you to see me," Sir Roderick began awkwardly, as she gave him her hand without speaking. "I hope you are better?"

"I am quite well, thank you," she said, in a perfectly expressionless voice which yet sounded very tired. "Won't you sit down?" she added.

She seated herself as she spoke in a chair near to the window, and Sir Roderick mechanically obeyed her, and placed himself opposite to her.

"It is very good of you," Richenda said formally, "to take the trouble to come and say good-bye. I think you said in your note that you were going to Queensland?"

"To Queensland."

Sir Roderick tried his best, but no effort on his part would furnish him with another word. His abrupt answer spoken, he sat gazing at the floor without lifting his head.

"You are leaving England for good?"

Richenda's quietly spoken question broke a little pause, but Sir Roderick had no conception of this fact. He was wholly concentrated on maintaining enough self-control to enable him to get creditably through the duty which was growing, every

moment, more difficult to him. He was struggling, and struggling violently, with an impulse which had arisen in him at the sight of Richenda. Over and over he repeated to himself that it was a mad impulse; that he was losing his head; that he must and would hold his tongue at all costs. But he longed suddenly, with an almost overpowering longing, to break through all conventionalities and tell her, simply, all that he had felt for her from the beginning of their acquaintance, and to ask her to forgive him for all that had been mean and unworthy on his part. Not to propose to her. Of that he never dreamed. He only wanted, as he said to himself, to tell her all about it before he went.

It was only by a great effort that he smothered these feelings, and found voice to say in a matter-of-fact tone:

"Yes. I am going for good."

Richenda made no response, and a little silence fell on the two. A sense of the absolute necessity of finding something to say, if he wished to control that impulse of which he was moment by moment more painfully conscious, made Sir Roderick break it.

"I shall miss your brother most awfully," he said, with an excessive cheeriness that was the result of his efforts to speak easily and naturally. "He and I have become great chums, you know—no, you don't know, though. How should you?"

"Indeed, I do know," Richenda said, and there was more animation in her voice than she had displayed at all before. "You've been very good to Jack, and he will miss you terribly."

Sir Roderick's effort at deprecation of this died away in a confused murmur, and scarcely thinking of his words he plunged suddenly into another subject.

"I've been saying good-bye to the children—your—the Fitzgerald children, you know," he said. "I'm really awfully sorry to see the last of them—jolly little beggars!"

Richenda's face also had been bent steadily on the floor. As Sir Roderick spoke she lifted it very abruptly.

"Yes," she said, in a voice that sounded strained and a little absent. "Yes. I'm sure they'll miss you. I expect they were very sorry, weren't they?"

About the corners of Richenda's mouth there was an odd little weary droop. It grew more and more perceptible as she spoke. Sir Roderick had, he told himself,

not seen how tired and ill she looked until now; and into his mind there came a vivid picture of the long past day by the Serpentine, when she had looked weary and worried, and he had comforted her. He would have given years of his life for the right to comfort her now. He abused his own folly in recalling that day by the mention of the children; and then, suddenly feeling in the tumult of his emotions quite unable to keep an impassive countenance, he rose abruptly and unceremoniously from his chair, and walking to the window, turned his back upon his hostess and stared out of it in silence. He had not a thought to spare for Richenda's probable amazement at his proceedings. He was wholly occupied for the moment in mastering himself.

"I wish I were their nurse again!"

The words came with a choked, sobbing sigh from Richenda's chair.

Sir Roderick started as if he had been shot. He turned round with a very hasty movement. Richenda, whom he had last seen sitting decorously upright in her low chair, had let her head fall forward on to her hands, and between her fingers tears were falling thick and fast on to her brown dress. He cleared the space between them in two strides.

"Miss Leicester!" he said, in anxiously harassed tones. "What can I do? What have I done? May I fetch Jack? Any one, or anything?"

His anxious voice seemed only to distress her yet more, for she sobbed almost chokingly for some moments.

"No! No!" she sobbed at last. "You can't; you needn't do anything. I'm so sorry. I never meant to—to cry. It's only—it's only that I've made a great mistake of my life, somehow, and I am very miserable—and very— And now you're going away!"

Sir Roderick had been standing anxious, humble, and awkwardly helpless at Richenda's side. At the last half-whispered words, he knelt down by her side very hastily. His pale face was all strained and working with uncontrollable emotion and excitement.

"Miss Leicester," he said, as well as he could for his quick, gasping breaths, "will you tell me what you mean? What you have said is everything or worse than nothing to me. Tell me."

There was a long silence.

"I never, never meant to," Richenda sobbed. "But you're going away, and I

don't—I don't know what I shall do when you're gone."

"I shall never go."

Sir Roderick took Richenda's hands from her face, and she hid its tear-stains on his shoulder.

Veronica and Dolly were both "brides," and Brian wore a velvet suit as a page.

The children never come away from Lady Graeme's house now, without an argument as to which of them it was to whom the idea of asking Sir Roderick to "do the marrying" first occurred. Sir Roderick's own definite statement that the idea had first been his own property, makes no impression whatever upon them.

Jack Leicester, for whom the children quickly conceived a close friendship, confided to Veronica once, by way of making peace in one of these discussions, that it had also occurred to him. But he was received with scorn.

THE DRAMATIC CENSORSHIP.

THE death of the late Mr. E. F. Smyth Pigott, the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays, and the keen competition which has taken place for the vacant post, have brought the whole question of the licensing of plays—and, for the matter of that, of places of public entertainment—into prominence once more. A bitter newspaper fight has been going on among the critics, and, as is always noticeable in every controversy about theatrical matters, the conflict has been more remarkable for hard hitting and hard words than for the softening of manners and the absence of ferocity which the Latin writer, in the innocence of his heart, erroneously supposed to be the outcome of a diligent study of the ingenuous arts.

On the face of it there seems to be no reason why one should not keep one's temper when one is discussing the question whether the State should impose any restraint upon the manner in which the public is to be provided with amusement, and, if so, what it should be and how far it should go. Neither is it clear why the discussion over the merits or demerits of a dramatist like Henrik Ibsen should make the disputants foam at the mouth and rage like inhabitants of the dangerous wards in Bedlam. But these things are so, nevertheless, and it is not a little significant that the only people who have thought it

fair or decent at the late Licensor's coffin are to be found in the ranks of the confirmed Ibsenites. Mr. Pigott did not like Ibsen. Once upon a time he said: "I have studied Ibsen's plays pretty carefully, and all the characters in Ibsen's plays appear to me morally deranged. All the heroines are dissatisfied spinsters who look on marriage as a monopoly, or dissatisfied married women in a chronic state of rebellion against not only the conditions which nature has imposed on their sex, but against all the duties and obligations of mothers and wives. As for the men, they are all rascals or imbeciles." Furthermore, he said that he had licensed the plays because he considered them to be too absurd to do any harm. With these opinions some people will agree altogether, some partially, and some in no wise, but they do not, in any case, justify the bestrewal of Mr. Pigott's grave with such flowers of speech as "a walking compendium of vulgar insular prejudice," "his official career in relation to the higher drama was one long folly and panic," "stupendously incompetent," "immoral balderdash," "the vulgar hands of such a noodle as this amiable old gentleman, this despised and incapable old official, most notoriously was," which occur in an article by Mr. Bernard Shaw in the "Saturday Review." That the redoubtable G. B. S. does not like Mr. Pigott's office is quite conceivable, and, indeed, natural; but it is a pity that, finding himself short of arguments against it, he should have relied upon what is, after all, mere Billingsgate abuse of a dead man. Probably Mr. Shaw did not know Mr. Pigott. To those who did—and I am one of them—the "Saturday Review" outcry is quite as grotesque as it is unjust. And this is saying a great deal.

How weak the argument against the Censorship is, is to be found in the fact that Mr. Shaw offers to produce "a staggering list of authors who have not written for the theatre since the evil day when Walpole established the Censorship to prevent Fielding from exposing the corruption of Parliament on the stage," a proposal which reminds one of the criminal who opposed to the witness of his theft the testimony of a dozen of his friends who swore that they did not see him commit it. Is there any evidence of any distinguished writer who was prevented from writing for the stage because of the existence of the Licensor of Plays? I, at least, have never heard of one. Nor is Mr. Shaw even consistent.

"Fielding never wrote another play," he says, "and from his time to that of Dickens, who was once very fond of the stage"—why "once"?—"a comparison of our literature with our drama shows a relative poverty and inferiority on the part of the latter not to be paralleled in any of the countries where the Censor only interferes on political grounds." But we have it on Mr. Shaw's own evidence that the Censorship was instituted by Walpole to deal with Fielding on political grounds.

It is sometimes—often, indeed—said that a Censorship such as that which deals with the theatre would not be allowed to last for a week if it were applied to other forms of literature and art; and the statement may be true, although, in face of the perfect apathy and indifference of the public to the Lord Chamberlain and all his works, I doubt it. But it must not be forgotten that the law steps in, very effectually sometimes, in the case of published books and exhibited pictures which are held to be immoral or improper. Poor Mr. Vizetelly, I should think, after his sentence of fine and imprisonment for having published translations of some of Zola's books, must often have meditated on the advantages of a Censorship which stops you at the outset, over one which waits until you have completed your publication, and then pounces on you with unsheathed claws and gleaming, murderous teeth.

The apathy and indifference of the public at large on this question is, I think, mainly to be found in the fact that the opponents of the Censorship have never been able to produce, and support their arguments with, any work of art of which it can honestly be said that the refusal of its license was not perfectly justifiable. Some few plays which Mr. Pigott refused to license have been published, but the public has shown no disposition to look upon their authors as martyrs, or, indeed, to consider them unfairly treated at all. On the other hand, many plays have been licensed of late years which have impressed the public with the idea that the Examiner of Plays was, if any particular fault could be found with him, far too amiable and easy. And it is not uninteresting to note that, with one brilliant exception, these plays have not been found in any special degree attractive or remunerative. Furthermore, I think that the public perceives that if the Licensor of Plays goes, so, logically, must also go the Licensors of Theatres and Music Halls, and that thus all managers of places of public

entertainment will be left to do just what they like, and, perceiving the fact, is not at all prepared to face the consequences.

THE ABBEY OF DEADLY NIGHTSHADE.

BARROW-IN-FURNESS is almost American in its energy, in the sense of rapid growth that pervades it—growth yet far from completed—in its broad thoroughfares, and its ugliness. But it is scoured by the sea breezes, and it has the famous Abbey in its Glen of the Deadly Nightshade, accessible from the heart of the town by a steam tramway. They are an able-looking people, these of Barrow, and it is not the fault of their vicinity if their strength of body and will is not graced and refined by nature and art.

The road from the town to the Abbey is on a hot day an insufferable one to the pedestrian. In time it will—if the sea winds will let it—have shade in the stripling trees set along the straight white highway. But the time is a decade or two distant. Years are necessary, moreover, to soften the staring newness of the villa residences which stretch far from the shops and red tenements of the town's business centre. An accredited æsthete would shudder to live in such a quarter. Even the joys of electric light would not seem to him much compensation. The hard white road and the jarring of the tramcars outside the house would add to his discomfort. I suppose the periodical procession of greasy-jacketed dock operatives, and nursemaids, and children, towards the shrine of the Abbey might be coupled with these other sources of spiritual shock. While, lastly, there are plenty of advertisement hoardings with their various pictorial delights. One may read poetry on these unsightly wooden walls. Here is a specimen of it:

Get married and furnish at Wood's,
Or emigrate and sell your goods.

This, too, has the American tone. It is not at all in keeping with the drowsy peace and inertia of the precincts of the Abbey to Our Lady in Deadly Nightshade Glen, hard by.

But it is just such a place as Barrow that may be best profited by the suggestive ruins of a building like the Abbey. Annex them to a tranquil cathedral city, and their value would sink by one-half. The Benedictines and Cistercians of Furness have done more good with their noble,

embellished building in these latter years than they could have foreseen.

The better way to approach the Abbey is to go by train to it direct, without entering Barrow. Then one steps from the railway carriage into the sequestered, cup-shaped hollow, thick in trees and populous with disestablished walls, and straightway breathes the sweet if rather relaxing air of monastic tranquillity. There is nothing discordant in the Abbey glen. An hotel stands in the old conventual domain, built of certain of the Abbey materials and certain others well in harmony with them; else one sees nothing but a rich comminglement of soaring fragments of chiselled stone, emerald-hued grass and trees worthy of an untroubled wood, with hawthorn, elder, and briar rise in dense brakes. One thing only is missed to make the scene perfect of its kind. There is here no crystalline river to add its murmur to that of the wind in the trees. The ditch that traverses the so-called ancient Guest Hall is quite otherwise than a thing of beauty. Even the children who come hither from Barrow's back streets do not paddle in the ditch. They prefer to take off their shoes and stockings and roam in the long grass of the courtyard of the cloisters. One cannot conceive that this poor little brook was ever fit to be mentioned in the same breath with the rivers that charm at Buildwas, Fountains, Tintern, Melrose, and our many other abbeyed retreats. To be sure, the sea is not remote. But there is no suggestion of it in this hot recess absorbed almost wholly by the Abbey buildings and enclosures.

Sycamores grow well here, as in the Lake District to the north. Their bossy outlines contrast well with the rugged configuration of the walls of the Abbey, whose subdued pink flush goes admirably with the omnipresent verdure.

There is nothing obtrusive here. The custodian of the little photograph shop by the entrance gate does not press purchases upon the visitor; he prefers, on a July day, to enjoy his cool nook unvexed by rebuffs. Further, there are two or three uniformed officials who go and come among the ruins; bronzing in the sun and resting momentarily in the shade. Their duty is a necessary one. But it does not seem as if enlightened Barrow turns out the usual proportion of ruin despoilers. True, the choicer work of the capitals and sedilia is not within reach; yet there is scope enough left for mischief. The Abbey's

modern patrons, however, appear to love it too well to harm it. They may be seen lying on its grass, or picnicking in its refectory, using as seats the stumps of the pillars that once supported its ceiling. Otherwise they treat it with a respect bordering upon reverence. The gentlemen with the gilt buttons go to and fro yawning in the heat, as eager, apparently, for a little desultory conversation with a stranger as the immortal Wearyworld, and almost nervous with pleasure if the visitor be of the kind who wish to see everything at close quarters, and coax padlocks to open with silver pieces.

One must go far to match the majesty of the broken windows of the Furness Abbey Church. The Church was not large, measured by cathedral standards: some two hundred and seventy-five feet by sixty-five. But it must have been gloriously flooded with light from the gigantic eastern window, which touches what one may conjecture to have been the roof-line. The arch dividing the choir from the nave is of a magnitude in harmony with the windows. It makes one feel very small as one stands at the grill which now protects the Abbots' tombs and the sedilia from destructive hands and feet. But the longer one stands in appreciation of it, the more one is prone to forgive the huge window its curious assault upon the self-esteem of the individual.

The majority of the Abbey's visitors care little to be told that the Transitional and Perpendicular styles of architecture are here splendidly illustrated. Their indifference does not seem to matter very much. An ironworker takes his pipe from his mouth while he gazes at the fern-decked wall of the south transept. Afterwards he looks around for a sympathetic ear, to which he confides his conviction that "yon's a big 'un." Two girls in pale blue blouses roam arm-in-arm across the grass of the nave, which has a blue ceiling in the sky. They carry scarlet sunshades, and make a strong show of colour. Perhaps they are milliners out for a holiday; perhaps they are heiresses. The one murmurs to the other, "Isn't it nice?" as they step towards the cloisters, upon which the afternoon sun burns like fire. And a married couple may be seen ensconced on the north side of the Abbot's private chapel, with a shawl bespread upon the sloping sward for the baby to roll on. Periodically they issue orders to their larger infants, who have a tendency to break bounds. But for the

most part they sit side by side in contemplative calmness, with their hands folded in front of them, blinking at the sunshine on the grass, and wiping their moist faces. This, too, is enjoyment. It were a waste of energy to talk to any of these of "sept-foiled arches," "ogee mouldings," or "diamond-formed finials." I am not, perhaps, very wrong in thinking that few people like even their descriptive literature to be so closely pictorial. It is a hard strain upon the mind, and often next to nothing comes of it.

However, even those who are ignorant of architectural "technique" may enjoy the beauty of the Chapter House at Furness. This, for a ruin, is excellently preserved. Its grouped and fluted columns still lift themselves towards the heavens, and but little mere imaginative power is needful to recreate the scenes it witnessed when the Abbot and the superior brethren here assembled to transact business, and welcome such visitors as Magnus, King of Man, and passing travellers of undeniable distinction. Furness was in the Middle Ages rather too remote from Court centres to be often a recipient of the doubtful blessing of Royal calls. But one may assume that its hospitality would in such cases be proportioned to its wealth. For the kinglings of Man, however, it was at least a convenience to be on cordial terms with an Abbot who exercised a sovereignty almost equal to their own in the little island towards which Barrow nowadays sends its weekly freight of tourists.

The number of monks attached to Furness seems not to have exceeded thirty. For them the more strictly conventual parts of the Abbey were certainly large enough. They sat in the choir of the church, conversed and ate in the refectory or day room, and slept in the dormitories over the day room. But besides these monks there were many score of lay brethren who found their livelihood in the Abbey estates—sufficiently extensive—and from the nave of the great church participated in the gorgeous services of Catholicism in its most florid era. One can people the Abbey precincts with them and their kindred, and give the picture a pretty touch in the children going and coming between the tenants' houses and the monastery, in which they were taught to sing and cypher. We have it on the best authority that these tenants or retainers of the Abbey received weekly out of the Abbey stores "sixty burrels of ale or beer, every barrel containing ten gallons or thereabouts

—that the tenants had also weekly thirty dozens of coarse wheat bread, and sufficient iron for their ploughs and other utensils of husbandry, and timber for repairing their houses; that every tenant having a plough had two persons to come to dinner one day in every week, from Martinmas to Pentecost; and that it was lawful for the tenants to send their children to school in the monastery, and such children were allowed to come into the hall every day either to dinner or supper." Nor was this all. Two pounds weekly was distributed among these happy folk, in addition to the above substantial rations. The tenants were, of course, in a state of vassalage; but there seems good reason to believe the rule of the Abbots of Furness was mild compared with that of the barons of the land, or even with that of other large monastic houses at special epochs.

Langland, in his "Piers Plowman," was justified in rating certain monasteries for their abuses; but houses of the eminence of Furness cannot be classed with those upon which the eloquent ex-monk expends such rare powers of diatribe and malediction.

The guest room nowadays stands open to the winds. A group of hale young sycamores hob-a-nob in its eastern extremity, and the ditch already referred to runs through it diagonally. There is enough grass within its former enclosure to attract the modern hay-ward. But there is nothing at all to help us to reconstruct the scenes it saw evening after evening for centuries. Monsieur Jusserand, in his "Wayfaring in England in the Fourteenth Century," may supply that lack for those who crave an exact furnishing of the roofless and wall-less apartment. Perhaps it is not quite an affair of chance that this enclosure and the conventual refectory seem to be the most favoured resorts for the holiday-makers from Barrow with sandwiches and flasks in their pockets. Whether the brook or ditch which traverses the room now traversed it wholly or in part five hundred years ago, I know not; but it would assuredly have been useful then for the grime-stained pedlars and others who looked to the Abbot of Furness for a night's lodging and some plain food. Only the regular monks of the Abbey drank wine, we are told. But doubtless there was good ale and water for these pauper itinerants as well as for the monastery vassals.

The reddish sandstone of which the Abbey is built—this is the region for hematite—has withstood wind and weather marvellously. Only in few places has it

been harshly used. The decorated work—from gargoyles to capitals and beaded archways—as we see it now, proves the conscientiousness of the old masons no less than the protected situation of the Abbey. The ruin will cast a ruddy glow on the green grass of midsummer for many a generation yet to come; and if a forecast in exact keeping with present events may be offered, a hundred years hence men and women will continue to come hither to read their newspapers and novels, smoke cigars, nurse their babes, and whisper tender words in each other's ears beneath the long shadow of the gaunt church walls.

For one thing the sentimental visitor ought to be thankful. The railway, though almost as near to the ruins as to Conway Castle, in Wales, discreetly obliterates itself. At the worst, its engines do but give forth a muffled, respectful screech as they glide from the Abbey station in the hollow towards the open country at the extremity of which, seawards, lies Barrow, in the territory over which of yore the Abbots of Furness exercised lordship.

For four centuries Furness Abbey was a great name and power in the north of England. Then the Dissolution of the Monasteries began.

Threats come which no submission may assuage,
No sacrifice avert, no power dispute;
The tapers shall be quenched, the belfries mute,
And, 'mid their choirs unroofed by selfish rage,
The warbling wren shall find a leafy cage,
The gadding bramble hang her purple fruit,
And the green lizard and the gilded newt
Lead unmolested lives, and die of age.

These words of Wordsworth are no more applicable to Furness than to the other Abbeys of the land; and, also, no less applicable.

On the ninth of April, 1537, the Abbot and his Prior and twenty-eight monks met in the Chapter House for the last time, and signed away what might almost be called their second birthright. From Furness the Abbot condescended to the living of Dalton, near the Abbey, where he existed with humbled head on some thirty or forty pounds of income per annum.

AGENTS OF DESTRUCTION.

It is sufficiently curious that the march of civilisation is marked by the perfecting of instruments of destruction. Science is constantly striving to devise that which will destroy what Science is constantly striving to construct. We build an iron-clad floating-battery replete with all the

machinery and mechanical devices that the skill of man, after the concentrated application of centuries, is able to contrive; and then we immediately proceed to invent something that will hurl the whole contrivance into space in the swiftest possible manner. Like our old school-friends, Balbus and Caius, we are ever building walls and pulling them down again.

And perhaps few of us realise how large an effect upon the destinies of the world is exercised by gunpowder. In the rivalry of nations to possess the most powerful explosive that can be produced, there is industrial as well as scientific competition. And in the struggle for existence among nations the possessor of the most powerful destroying agent must always occupy a place of advantage. This rivalry has brought about a curious condition of modern warfare. Nations do not so often face each other with gun and sword as they do with plans of ingenious inventions of destruction. They are all engaged in a campaign the object of which is alternately to produce an armour that nothing can pierce, and something that will shatter that impenetrable armour. We have arrived at such a point of extravagant outlay in this pursuit, that a steel-clad target is constructed at the cost of several thousands of pounds merely to be shot at by a gun which costs several thousands more, and every discharge of which costs several hundreds! If Roger Bacon really invented "villainous saltpetre," he never dreamed of it being put to such uses.

Whoever invented gunpowder certainly revolutionised the art of warfare. Muscular force gave way to chemical action, skill in arms was replaced by skill in armaments. The sword was not beaten into ploughshares but into gun-metal, and the stone of the sling of the primitive savage became the ball of the cannon.

Yet the ancients had some knowledge of science, too, and in the Greek-fire of old we may find the germ of the explosive shell. The invention of Greek-fire is usually ascribed to Callinicus, about the time of the siege of Constantinople by the Moslems. With this fire he worked miraculous destruction among the invading fleet. What its composition was is not now exactly known, but chemists are of opinion that it was a combination of saltpetre, resin, and sulphur. If so, the idea may somehow or other have reached Greece from China, for the Chinese claim to have been acquainted with the powers of saltpetre in the remote

centuries before the Christian era. Whatever Greek-fire was composed of, it was discharged from tubes, and must, therefore, have had projectile as well as incendiary properties.

Although gunpowder is said to have been first used in warfare in Europe at the battle of Crecy, Prescott says that it was employed by the Moorish King of Granada at the siege of Baza, in 1312; that it is mentioned in an Arab treatise of 1249; and that a Spanish manuscript of the eleventh century mentions artillery as in use at a naval engagement between the Moors of Tunis and the Moors of Seville of that period. Perhaps, however, what the Moors derived from the Arabs was only a form of the combustible which Callinicus used at Constantinople, for, according to Marcus Græcus, Greek-fire was in the tenth century propelled by its own gas in the form of rockets.

Thus, before the invention of gunpowder, as we know it, something in the nature of artillery was used for the projection of Greek-fire, and as we know from various sources, vinegar was used to put out the fire. But it did not throw a projectile, and the great object of the fighting animal, man, was to obtain a force that would hurl a destructive missile to a great distance, while the thrower remained in comparative security.

Now the first known formula for the composition of gunpowder is said to occur in an Arabic manuscript of the thirteenth century, where the ingredients are given as ten parts of saltpetre, two parts of charcoal, and one and a half part of sulphur. This was not a very efficient mixture, and when, in the first half of the following century, cannon came into use in Europe—small arms were somewhat later—the composition seems to have been something like ten per cent. of sulphur, fifteen per cent. of charcoal, and seventy-five per cent. of saltpetre. This was reduced to dust, and it got so mixed with dirt and other matter as to be very uncertain in its effects; for which reason it was slow, at first, in coming into favour in European warfare.

The first cannon were of wood bound with leather, and then iron hoops were introduced. From the use of iron hoops to the use of iron entirely was an easy transition, but brass cannon were for long the most esteemed. Some of the brass guns of the fifteenth century are said to have been capable of throwing stone

balls weighing over six hundredweight. Such a gun was employed in 1449 by Mahomet the Second in besieging that very city of Constantinople which eight hundred years previously had been defended with Greek-fire. Breech-loading cannon were used by Cortez in Mexico in 1519, and were in existence in England in 1545. But they were soon given up, and muzzle-loading was adopted until quite recent times.

To return, however, to gunpowder. This, as we have said, was at first produced and used in the form of dust, but in time it was perceived that the explosive power was greater when the powder was granular. This led to investigations of the size of grain, kind of glazing, and other details which affect the explosive and projectile quality of the composition. Then changes in the character of the guns used necessitated changes in the condition of the powder. Thus when, after the Crimean War, rifled cannon were introduced, a new quality of powder had to be devised; and as the size of guns went on increasing up to the mammoth hundred-and-ten-tonners, the chemical composition of the gunpowder required constant study.

The immense expense of big guns necessitated another consideration besides the throwing of the missile with the greatest possible velocity to the greatest possible distance; and this was that the powder should exercise a less degree of pressure on the gun so as to reduce wear and tear to a minimum. To-day, then, the scientific artillerist looks to the scientific manufacturer of gunpowder to provide him with a composition which must be nicely adjusted to the size and character of the gun, the weight of the missile to be projected, and the force at which the projection is desired. Many different classes of powder are now required for the various classes of guns.

The use of glazing in preserving the grains from the action of the air and facilitating transport, seems to have been discovered two or three hundred years ago, but it was not until the American Civil War that the advantage of large oblong grains, about an inch long, for the charging of smooth-bore guns, was found. Nowadays the size of grain varies very much with the size of gun, but the favourite shape of the grain is hexagonal. The explosive, shell was invented towards the end of last century, and the efforts of men are now being directed to produce more deadly and

destructive effects with this shell than has been possible with a gunpowder filling. Torpedoes were used during the Crimean War, and are still, as then, charged with gunpowder, but in a much more ingenious and efficacious fashion, with complicated machinery for regulating the propulsion and explosion under water.

The great disadvantage of gunpowder in warfare is the smoke created by the discharge. Some military critics, it may be remarked, are of opinion that the smoke has quite as great compensating advantages, and at some military manoeuvres smoke was purposely caused in order to conceal the movements of the troops. But for many years past the efforts of scientists have been bent on the production of an absolutely smokeless powder. Several so-called smokeless powders have been produced, but they are not absolutely smokeless. What is called smokeless powder is obtained by using nitrate of ammonia instead of saltpetre, straw charcoal instead of wood charcoal, and a smaller proportion of sulphur.

Some thirty years ago a smokeless powder was introduced into the Austrian Army, which was thought a great success—for a time. It was made of gun cotton, in long strips not unlike the shape of modern cordite; but it could not be kept for a very length of time, and the factory blew up. This difficulty of preservation seems to apply to all or nearly all the smokeless powders yet introduced, as their tendency is to absorb moisture. The smoke from the discharge of gunpowder consists of finely divided particles of sulphate and carbonate of potassium, and amounts to about fifty per cent. of the total products of combustion, the other products being gaseous. The idea of smokeless powder is that the products of combustion should be entirely gaseous, and the employment of quick-firing guns has made such a result more and more desirable.

In the effort to obtain smokeless gunpowder, we have procured three new powerful explosives, namely, blasting gelatine, reputedly the most powerful of all known explosives; dynamite, considered the cheapest; and gun-cotton, said to be the safest to handle. The characteristic of these three explosives is that they instantaneously and totally explode, while gunpowder burns and pushes its way. Taking the last named first, we find the germ of gun-cotton in the experiments of the French chemist, Pérouze, so long ago as 1833. These experiments had reference to the action of strong nitric

acid on starch, sawdust, and paper, in causing them to burn with great rapidity. Seven years later the Germans Schönbein and Böttger actually made gun-cotton, and proclaimed its superior explosive energy to gunpowder. The difficulty, however, was to keep it, and to regulate the rate of combustion; and it was not until comparatively recent years that Sir Frederick Abel showed how gun cotton can be made and kept without danger or deterioration, if washed free of superfluous acid.

Just about the same time as gun cotton was made by the two Germans, the explosive quality of nitro-glycerine was discovered, but it was not until 1860 that Alfred Nobel's patent brought it into practical use, and it is from nitro-glycerine that we have obtained dynamite and blasting gelatine.

Dynamite is nitro-glycerine so mixed with powdered silica as to absorb about three-fourths of the moisture of the glycerine. The silica employed is a porous earth called "kieselguhr," which is found in Hanover, and which consists of the shells of microscopic animalcula. By absorbing the explosive nitro-glycerine liquid in this earth the danger of carrying it about in a liquid form was avoided, and yet the mixture produced proved more explosive than nitro-glycerine itself. But owing to the admixture of this "kieselguhr" there is necessarily a considerable proportion of inert matter in dynamite, and the next discovery was that by dissolving nitrated cotton in nitro-glycerine, the latter lost its fluidity, and a jelly-like composition was formed that could be moulded or rolled into sheets. This is what is now known as Nobel's Blasting Gelatine, and is reputed to be the most powerful explosive in existence.

There have been numerous other combinations of nitro-glycerine which have been tried at different times—such as nitro-glycerine and nitrate of soda, forming what was called Lithofracteur; nitro-glycerine and sulphur, forming what was called Vigorite; and nitro-glycerine and sawdust, forming what was called Vulcan powder. A blasting gelatine has also been obtained by a mixture of gly-oxylin and forcite, with the addition of paraffin to make it waterproof. A composition called Atlas Powder was obtained by using wood pulp to absorb the moisture of nitro-glycerine; and another called nitro-magnite was obtained by saturating magnesia with nitro-glycerine.

All these are highly explosive materials,

as may be judged from the fact that while after combustion gunpowder has sixty-eight per cent. of solid residue, nitro-glycerine has no solid residue. Nitro-glycerine contains more than enough oxygen to burn up all the other constituents, and that is why other substances can be added to it which help to regulate the combustion.

Some twenty years ago the French chemist Désignolle discovered that a mixture of saltpetre and potassium-picrate produced an effective bursting charge for torpedoes and shells, but later Sir Frederick Abel discovered that an ammonium picrate produced still better results. These discoveries directed a great deal of attention to picric acid, and by-and-by Dr. Sprengel found that this acid was itself capable of being detonated by the use of fulminate of mercury. Some ten years ago the Turpin patent was taken out for the use of picric acid for shells and torpedoes—one of the processes being to render the acid less sensitive by melting and pouring it while in a melted state into the shells.

A peculiarity of fulminate of mercury is that it produces a shock to which all other substances are sensitive, and its supreme value as an explosive rests in this fact, and in the known liability of all explosives to be detonated by more or less distant explosions. There is a current of sympathetic influence in these terrible chemical compositions that is as strange as it is dangerous. What is required to produce explosion is the rapid generation of great heat along with large quantities of oxygen. In gunpowder, for instance, the nitrate of potash—saltpetre—which is the chief ingredient is practically imprisoned oxygen, and when it is decomposed along with charcoal, an immense heat is developed which causes the gases to expand suddenly—hence explosion.

One of the most recently invented explosives is melinite, which is a composition of gun-cotton, picric acid, and gum arabic, and is said to be three times as powerful as gunpowder. Picric acid is formed by the action of nitric acid on carbolic acid. Melinite powder was designed for use in the Lebel magazine-rifle, and also in those mysterious shells about which so much was recently heard in France.

What are known as "Sprengel Explosives" are mixtures of two prepared liquids, or of a liquid and a solid, kept separate for transport, and brought together when required for use. Such are Rackarock, a mixture of chlorate of potash

and petroleum, such as was used for the blasting of the Hellgate rocks at the entrance of New York Harbour; Hellhofite, a mixture of nitrate tar-oil with strong nitric acid; and Oxonite, a mixture of picric acid and nitric acid. None of these are allowed to be used in England because of their extreme sensitiveness to friction.

There is a class known as "Safety Explosives," of which the base is usually a nitro-naphtha mixed with ammonia or potash. Some of these are known as Bellite, Securite, Roburite, and Ammonite.

In the case of Roburite, a German chemist, Carl Roth, hit upon the idea of introducing a little chlorine into the mixture, so as to reduce the temperature at explosion and prevent flame. It is a composition of nitrate of ammonia and chlorinated nitro-benzol, each of which is non-explosive by itself, and only explosive in combination, which is not effected until just before use. The peculiarity of Roburite, and some other of the new explosives, is that it cannot be exploded by either fire, percussion, or electricity, and that even if mixed with gunpowder it is unaffected by the firing of the powder. Roburite can only be exploded by means of a small quantity of fulminate of mercury, which is inserted into the cartridge just before use. It is chiefly employed for blasting in mines.

The name of deadly explosives now is legion, and the present object of science seems to be to find the best construction of exploding shell to do the greatest amount of damage at the longest range. As a filler of bombs and shells and torpedoes the days of gunpowder are numbered. There is another change, too, in the character of shells. Instead of a ball of great strength to penetrate heavy armour and then explode, the aim is to produce a thin shell of large size that will shatter without penetrating the object fired at. Thus a shell has been made filled with gun-cotton saturated with paraffin, the explosive action of which is so tardy that the shell can be forced right into thick armour before it explodes, with terrific effect; while shells filled with picric acid, or melinite, can be thrown by mortars so as to operate with even greater effect from the outside. The Americans have perfected a pneumatic-gun with which they can throw a charge weighing six hundred pounds of dynamite and blasting gelatine; and this gun can, it is said, be used with any explosive, without the risk of premature explosion to

which ordinary guns are more or less liable.

The problem which is chiefly occupying experts just now is how to produce the most destructive shell, allied with the most perfect method of explosion.

SAM PENDARN'S LADY DAUGHTER.

A COMPLETE STORY. CHAPTER I.

It was in the early part of the present century, when Waterloo was still fresh in people's minds, and "Old Boney" was still a name to frighten children with, when railways were as yet unknown, and the "Flying Western" coach took close on twenty-four hours with good roads and fair weather between London and the cross-roads at the back of the common, that Sam Pendarn's "lady" daughter became one of the population of Halcombe Quay.

How often the tale had been told in the red-curtained bar of the "Fishermen's Arms" there is no reckoning. It was the landlord's favourite story, and no stranger ever came to Halcombe that did not hear it. If he had not already noticed, and become subject to, Caroline Pendarn's dark eyes and graceful figure, the story would awake in him a lively curiosity to come across the heroine of so remarkable a tale; if, as was more likely, he had already seen Miss Pendarn, the story had for him a double interest.

"I du mind the night now," the landlord would say musingly, between the puffs of his long pipe. "Lord! how it did blow, to be sure! It was just gone eight o'clock by the old clock that's hangin' now in the kitchen yonner, when they rush in, several on 'em, and tell me as there's a ship a-goin' to pieces on the Black Spit, wot's just beyond West Point, d'yu mind?—betwixt Halcombe and Rymouth. An' goin' to pieces she was, tu, sure-ly. No ship as ever putt to sea cud live there long, on such a night. There she lay, bumpin' an' thuddin' an' grindin' of herself upon the rocks—that loud that we cud hear the smashin' of her more'n a hunderd yard away, through all the tearin' of the wind and the boom of the gurt waves upon the shingle—with her masteses a-hangin' alongside, an' the sea washin' clean over her, an'—there! 'twas cruel work to see, so 'twas! An' there was we, a-stannin' on the beach as 'elpless as labbies, twenty or thirty on us, an' nothin' to be done; for we cudn't putt off no

boo-out in a sea like that, let alone them aboard the ship. An' so she broke up—Lord 'elp them! There was never a one of them come ashore—not one.—Wull, when 'twas all over, an' there were nothin' more to be done, we was walkin' back steady along the beach—me an' Sam Pendarn, an' Josephus—him as used to be a Preventive, with one arm—an' a mort more of us—when Josephus he stops sudden and he says, says he, 'I du allow that were somebody screechin' over there!' Wull, we listened, an' we hurd it tu, then. An' what think you it were? Why, a babby! Lyin' just above where the waves come in, well-nigh smothered in foam an' sea-wid, an' soaked through with watter, but with life in her for all that. How she come alive through that boilin' ragin', thunderin' sea—an' not lashed on to anything, neither, mind you—was a reg'lar Providence. Howsumever, we carr'd her along with us, and she come round wonderfull; an' then Sam, bein' easy-like in his circumstances of life and lonesome with his own little boy, he tuk care of her an' brought her up as his own. An' a fine-growed gell she is, tu, an' does credit to him, I warrant.—We never foun' out the name of the ship, nor wot people the babby might belong to. There was wreckage come ashore, an' bodies, tu, but nothin' to judge by. They did say as how she were from the West Indies, boun' for Bristol port; but I huld tell as there weren't no babby on board of her, so it cudn't well be her, I'm thinkin'."

And the landlord of the "Fishermen's Arms" would take a long pull at his pipe, and shake his head sagaciously half a score of times before he brought the tale to a conclusion by remarking that it was a mortal queer story altogether, and that they did say Sam Pendarn's "lady" daughter was a real lady born, and shud likely be a duchess or some one of the quality in some furrin part, if she had her rights an' foun' out the people as she belonged to.

It was probably in deference to this view of her origin that she had acquired the name, by which she was known throughout Halcombe and the neighbouring parts, of Sam Pendarn's "lady" daughter. When, or by whom, the name had first been given to her, must ever be a question unsolved. The fact remains that, whether by reason merely of the romantic possibilities underlying the strange discovery of the nameless child on that

stormy night, or of the fabled value of a trinket that was found around her neck, or, as some more ungenerously hinted, of the somewhat haughty and overbearing character that Caroline Pendarn had developed during her upgrowing, she had from childhood enjoyed the reputation of being "a somebody," who should be possessed of boundless wealth if only she "had her rights."

Caroline herself believed implicitly in the correctness of this conclusion. It was perhaps as much as anything her almost unconscious assumption of superiority over the simple folk of Halcombe, her unquestioning acceptance of their tribute of respect, that had led them to extend the idle fireside speculation of twenty years ago until it became a popular conviction. There was, in fact, in this coincidence a mutual connection of cause and effect. It was, no doubt, the childish jests of her school-mates, echoing their elders' gossip, that had first planted in her mind the seeds of that feeling that she was somehow different from themselves; it was that feeling, maturing and fructifying in a certain haughtiness of manner and superiority of tone, that seemed so strikingly to corroborate the theories that had in reality been its origin.

In truth, Caroline Pendarn, at two-and-twenty, with her tall figure and stately bearing, her dark, handsome face and flashing eyes, her readiness of tongue and gentility of manner, presented so striking and so picturesque a contrast to the ordinary young womanhood of Halcombe, that a very stranger might be expected to weave some sort of romance out of such very promising materials.

As the Rector remarked more than once to old Sam Pendarn: "She is a very superior girl, Pendarn—very superior. It is odd how it all falls in with what we thought at first. But then, you know, birth will assert itself. You can always depend upon that."

And the Rector stroked his white hands softly, complacent in the reflection that birth had at any rate asserted itself unmistakeably in his own portly person.

The Reverend Samuel Draper had played no small part in the history of the orphan babe who had become known to the world as Caroline Pendarn.

Though still a young man, and almost fresh from Oxford, at the time when—not long before the night of that eventful storm—he had accepted the college living of

Halcombe, and settled down among its inhabitants, he had yet soon secured their respectful appreciation as a man of learning and resource. In none of his actions was the latter quality more conspicuous than in the ready manner in which he settled the much-disputed question of the name that should be given to the storm-baby.

"Let her be called Caroline," he had said, with a wave of the white hands. "It is a name that is respected, I trust, by each one of us. What name could be more meet for the little lest one?"

And so it was settled; and he himself became the baby's godfather.

It was no doubt due to this fact that he took a sort of proprietary interest in the little Caroline. He extended his patronage to her with marked indulgence, held her up to the village children—with greater frequency, perhaps, than discretion—as a noteworthy example of propriety and intelligence, lent her books in abundance from the Rectory book-shelves, personally superintended the completion of her education at the village school. Nor did the theory as to her birthright suffer at his hands. He was a man of no very high order of intellect, to whom a local mystery, with ample opportunity for speculation and discussion, came as a welcome relief from the monotony of the life at Halcombe Quay; and this mystery, in particular, shed an agreeable lustre of romance upon his parish that seemed to him to be by reflection not unbecoming to its Rector. Moreover, it was more pleasing to his susceptibilities, as well as more impressive to the parishioners, that his god-daughter should be suspected of no ignoble parentage. So that, during the whole of her upgrowing, he had fostered, rather than checked, the popular disposition to regard Caroline Pendarn as somebody "more than the usual."

In fine, it had been the frequently avowed intention of the Rector, as well as that of his good lady at the Rectory, to make the young woman a not unworthy occupant of any station which she might one day, please Heaven, be called upon to fill. But, while admitting to the full the benevolence and praiseworthiness of this intention, there is grave reason to doubt whether the means adopted for its accomplishment had not done much to blemish a really attractive character, and to convert a naturally proud nature into a disposition of such unreasonable haughtiness, that the half of Halcombe who did not scoff at it went in mortal fear of its scathing outbursts.

The Rector had been one of the first to examine the trinket that was found on the little one's neck—a locket set with a single stone and hung from a slender chain—and he had pronounced it to be in his opinion of considerable value. He had even talked dubiously of the King's right of wreck and of his duties as a magistrate; but nothing had come of it. The trinket had been kept mighty cautiously by old Sam Pendarn in the oaken locker under his bed, until one day, when Caroline was close on sixteen years of age, she had astounded him by suddenly demanding it, quietly but imperiously. Since then few eyes had seen it, but rumour gave out that she wore it constantly under her dress; and the wise-aces of Halcombe wagged their heads and wondered querulously "what the gell wanted fur to do, carryin' about that thing on her, as passon said were worth a sight o' money!"

But to young Sam Pendarn she had confided her true reason—that as it was a clue which might lead one day to the discovery of her parentage, she thought it only right to keep the locket in her own custody and under her own control. And Sam had answered that she was always right, and there was a deal in what she said.

From which it will be seen that young Sam did not share in the superior tone and education of his "lady" sister.

"Young" Sam—as he was known throughout the parish in contradistinction to "old" Sam Pendarn, now a shaky and somewhat morose old man, much addicted to the secret hoarding of money and the public protestation of extreme poverty—had succeeded to his father's business of village carpenter, boat-builder, and undertaker. He was a strapping young fellow of twenty-eight—Caroline's senior by six years—very strong, very healthy, very modest, and very monosyllabic. It may have been his modesty, or it may have been his monosyllabic proclivities, that had prevented him from telling that to Caroline Pendarn, which for five long years his heart had been nursing and cherishing and aching over. That is to say, had prevented him from telling her verbally; for we may be sure that the blundering young man had communicated his secret a thousand times by look and act and gesture to her woman's instinct. And all the village knew that "Sam was courtin' his sister Carline; but the gell thought herself too good for him, to be sure."

All of which was true. For, though young Sam had been her willing slave and

her champion in their school-days; though he had joyfully taken the daily burden of her lesson books and slate, and had carried her on his shoulder across the little Rye, when the stream was swollen with the winter's snows and the plank bridge had been washed from its muddy bearings; though he had fought and thrashed many a boy whose gibes at her "foreignering face" had brought the tears into her eyes; ay, though he had often stood between her and his father, when old Sam was troubled with one of his fits of surly anger, and had taken upon himself the credit and the consequences of her youthful delinquencies; and though, in later days, he had held himself steadily aloof—and Caroline knew why—from the tempting smiles and seductive arts of the village maidens, and had been blind in particular to the barefaced encouragement of that odious Polly Tredfillick, the schoolmaster's daughter; though Caroline was only too keenly conscious of all these things, there was yet the mystery of her parentage, the probability—as she told herself—of her lofty origin, the horror of an alliance with the village carpenter, should that origin be too late discovered, that haunted her restlessly by day and night, that closed her lips in haughty silence when she would fain have spoken, that stood always like a cold spectre between her and young Sam Pendarn.

And yet—it must be confessed now, whether or no she had ever had the courage to confess it to herself—Caroline Pendarn was in love with young Sam.

CHAPTER II.

THE sun was sinking behind the heaving level of waters. Away on the left, three headlands off, the dusky outline of the Black Spit jutted out jaggedly, its sombre clefts and ragged crags stricken with a blacker hue than ever in the failing light. The fitful wind blew coldly and gustily from the setting sun, raising faint specks of foam far out to sea and long white lines of surf at the cliff's foot. A thin, ghostly mist was stealing up from the narrow rock-bound inlet on the right, where Halcombe Quay lay nestled in the sheer delivory of the hills. And Caroline Pendarn stood beside the stile that straddled across the cliff-path on the brow of the West Point, with all the bleakness of the gusty evening, and all the dreariness of the fading scene, pictured and reflected in her own disconsolate face.

There had been no quarrel, but there was a coldness, between her and young Sam Pendarn. A coldness, as she only too well knew, that had grown out of her own frosty speeches, her own chilling haughtiness of demeanour, her icy pride that would let her see only the village carpenter where she would fain have seen the lover. And Caroline, despite the fact that she had thrice that week snubbed young Sam with a bitter, cruel snub, that she had thrice stoutly resisted the advances of his halting boldness and had routed it each time with direful decisiveness—despite her victories, and her sense of duty done, and the triumph of her relentless pride—was very, very unhappy.

It was the Harvest Home that night at the big farm on Halcombe Common; and Caroline had refused to go. Young Sam would be there, she knew well; he had announced his intention of going—somewhat irritably, it must be confessed—after the last of those three bitter snubs that Caroline, in her self-abnegation, had administered to him for his reason's welfare; he had started, very jubilant and loud-voiced, half an hour before Caroline had commenced her solitary clamber to the top of the West Point; no doubt he would enjoy himself immensely, and never miss his "lady" sister, but dance—it might be—with Polly Tredfillick or some other young person of his own class, and come home very late and none the better for the cider.

So thought Caroline, in the bitterness of her spirit, as she leant against the tumble-down stile, with the chilly wind blowing through her thin dress, and the mist beginning to blot out the kindling lights of Halcombe in the valley. In the extremity of her mortification she went further. Went so far as to wish him happiness with Polly Tredfillick and to hope, with rare generosity, that she would make him a good wife and not carry on with the men quite so much as she had done in days gone by. But in the very moment when these last bitter thoughts flashed angrily through her head, there came a great throb of her heart in cruel contradiction to them, and Caroline Pendarn, with all her wrath dissolved, leant her forehead upon the top rail of the old stile and sobbed in all the unutterable wretchedness of wounded pride and self-condemnation.

Suddenly a guttural voice, speaking within three feet of the crown of her cruelly ill-treated hat—which was being crushed beyond recognition by the obdurate bar of

the stile—made her jump back in perilous proximity to the cliff's edge, panting with fear and shame.

"Eh! my dear," the voice said, "I'm truly sorry to see ye in such distress of mind. Those pretty eyes were never made for weeping with—my gracious, no! Only for smiling on the boys with, my dear, and laughing at 'em sometimes, too, I'll be bound.—But ye're never afraid of Old Sol, my dear?" as Caroline retreated nearer and nearer towards the cliff, with her hands pressed closely against her heaving bosom. "Old Sol as is such a favourite, and fancies you more than all the girls of the village put together, and lets you have his pretty things dirt cheap, just to see the pleasure shining out of your bright eyes. Ye're not afraid of Old Sol?"

And the little old humpbacked man whipped off with marvellous dexterity the heavy pack that he carried on his shoulders, and rested it on the top of the stile, where Caroline's tears were standing in little streaks of moisture, the while he looked at her out of his twinkling black eyes with an insinuating Israelitish smile. Old Sol—it was the name he gave himself, and no one knew any other—was in fact a pedlar, who hawked his miscellaneous pack of goods up and down the country-side. Few villages there were—nay, few hamlets—in the shire that did not know the sight of his broad, squat figure, bent under the oilskin pack and leaning on his long, crooked staff. Few village maidens there were that did not look out for Old Sol's visits, and reward the labour of his persuasive tongue by the purchase of ribbons, and kerchiefs, and tawdry jewellery; few housewives who could not point to at least one piece of crockery or tinware as "boughten of Old Sol." But of all the villages on his rounds none was more honoured by the constancy of his visits than Halcombe Quay; and of all the village maidens of Halcombe, none stood so high in his favour as Caroline Pendarn. Never a visit did he pay to those parts but he managed to have half an hour's gossip with Caroline; and, when old Sam had been more than usually stingy, and Caroline could only shake her head at the pedlar's gauds, he had been known—to the marvel of the village folk—to relax the obligation of payment till a future day, or even, on occasions, to forego it altogether. For the rest, Old Sol had the character of a kindly old man, though no doubt a bit of a rogue in the exercise of his calling, whose prin-

cial failings—apart from professional roguery—were a want of personal cleanliness and an addiction to poaching; and Caroline, when she saw who the stranger was that had startled her, began to recover from her trepidation, and ceased to move towards the cliff's edge.

"Ye're never afeard of Old Sol, missy?" the old man continued in his wheedling tones. "Why, I can call to mind now how I used to carry ye about on my back astride of this pack of mine, and you thumping the old man with this very crooked stick. That was years ago, of course, my dear, and ye cared more for lollipops and comfits then than for necklaces and suchlike. But Old Sol he mostly found a comfit or two somewhere in the old pack for the missy, now didn't he, my dear? Ain't it the solemn truth, now? And then to be afeard of Old Sol!"

"I wasn't afraid of you, Daddy," said the girl, using the title that he had taught her to give to him years ago. "You startled me, that was all."

"I'm truly sorry, my dear, I'm truly sorry," said the pedlar, clambering nimbly up the stile and seating himself comfortably with his little bowed legs astride of it, and his chin resting forward on the top of his pack. "I thought you was lonely, my dear, and might stand in need of a bit of cheering up. But what was the tears about? Not weeping for one of the boys, as should all be crying their blessed eyes out for you, was you, my pretty?"

"No, I wasn't," cried Caroline hotly, "and you know it well enough. There's no one in Halcombe that I need cry for, I assure you. I'm very grateful to everybody for what they've done; but I don't mean to cry about them."

"Of course not, my dear; of course not. It's not to be expected," croaked the pedlar, eyeing her fixedly. "But maybe ye'd fancy to look at some of the pretty things in my pack here, and that 'ud charm away the tears? I've some of the sweetest pretty things here, and all fresh from London town, where they are worn by the tip-top aristocrats, my dear—so 'elp me truly!—only Old Sol knows how to get them cheap and sell them cheap, and that's the blessed difference."

And in an instant the little old hunchback had slid off the stile, and was on his knees on the grass before the open pack.

"Now, I have a ribbon here," he went on rapidly, "a sweet pretty ribbon, as I must really put against that gown of yours.

Why, bless my heart, sooner than not see you with that ribbon, as 'ud match your pretty face like a blessed picture, I'd give it to ye, I would indeed, so 'elp me——"

"No, no," she said irritably, stemming the torrent of a speech she had heard full often before. "I don't want anything now, Daddy; and if I did, I have no money to pay for it."

The old man looked up at her with a shrewd twinkle in his beady eyes.

"Maybe, now, if I was to go to young Mr. Pendarn——" he was beginning, when Caroline sprang forward at him with her face aflame.

"I dare you to do it," she cried. "I dare you to do it. What's all this talk about me and Sam, I should like to know? As if I, who may be anybody—anybody—would think of Sam! Why, I'd sooner die as I am than marry—him!"

Caroline, it may be remarked, in losing her temper had lost also some part of that elegance of manner which was the Rector's pride, and she spoke now like the veriest country maid.

There was silence for a few instants after this outburst. The old pedlar was the first to break it.

"Maybe I might be able to tell you something of who you are," he said slowly.

"What can you tell me?" cried Caroline, with an angry toss of her head. "What can you tell me more than I know?"

Old Sol very deliberately filled and lighted a blackened stump of clay pipe which he had taken from his pocket, and drew his legs in under him as he squatted on the grass—but said nothing.

"What can you tell me?" she repeated, but less defiantly.

There was a pause again. The hunchback still sat in front of his open pack with his eyes fixed musingly on Caroline, sucking vigorously at his blackened clay, and apparently revolving in his mind some subject of deep consideration.

"I'll tell ye a little story, my dear," he said at last, "as comes into my mind at this instant. A true story, my dear—as true as ever was—and concerning this part of the coast hereabouts. Sit ye down, sit ye down."

Caroline took no notice of the invitation, and the pedlar proceeded.

"There was a gentleman as I used to know particularly well, who went his rounds hereabouts—a gentleman in my line of business, my dear, but very different from me. Oh, yes! very different from me.

Quite the gentleman in every way; but affable and pleasant enough, for all that, and not above being friendly with an old man like me. Only he was very superior to Old Sol, you'll always remember, my dearie, won't you?—very superior to Old Sol! Mr. Smith he called himself, if my blessed memory's right, and he came from London town. A very superior gentleman for our line of business, my dear, very superior indeed!"

Old Sol was evidently getting uncomfortable over his tale, and his eyes, which had hitherto been fixed steadily on Caroline's face, now rambled twinklingly over the grey expanse of sea and sky before him.

"He told me this tale, you'll understand, missy—this Mr. Smith did—several years ago. Oh, a many years ago it must have been, before he died. He's dead now, poor man. He had married a gipsy lady—a Spanish gipsy, my dear, of very good blood in her own country, so they said, and very handsome. Remarkably like your sweet self she was, if one may say so and no offence given. An extraordinary likeness, I've often thought; and more and more of it as I've seen ye grow up. I used to meet her about with him, you see, my pretty one, so I ought to know, now oughtn't I? She was useful to him in his business, and they got on very comfortable together, so they did, though she had her tempers, I'll not deny, and maybe he had his too. Well, things went on, and there was a blessed baby born; and though he swore a bit, maybe—in a gentlemanly way, my dear, for he was always quite the gentleman—she managed the baby that wonderful that it never seemed to be in his way. But she couldn't stand the life of it winter-times, after her bringing up in foreign parts, and she was always weak-chested, poor thing; and one bitter night's tramping she was struck with a chill, and it went on her lungs. She had been a good wife to him, upon my soul she had; and when she died he went pretty near mad. Ye'll remember that, my dearie, won't ye, and not be too hard on him for what he did?" He was looking very straight, almost eagerly, at her face now. "There was only him to take care of the blessed child, a year old or thereabouts, and—Lord have mercy on him!—he wished then that the child had died along with her mother. He was only a tramping pedlar like me—though very superior to Old Sol, my dear—and what what was the likes of him to do with a

child?—Ye're following the story, my dear, and ye see how out of his blessed senses this man was?" he broke off anxiously.

Caroline had been standing by the stile, half-leaning on it with one arm. Her head was bowed, and her face deadly pale. Now she looked up and spoke slowly, articulating the words as if with difficulty:

"Do you mean to say that that child was me? If so, say so."

"Why, no, my dear," the old man rejoined hastily. "Bless my soul, no; I don't say nothing. It's only a little story, as I told you. Wait until the end comes, my dear, and then you'll see all about it.—One night," he went on, "just after she was buried—she's in Fernyeombe churchyard, my dear, over across the common—this Mr. Smith was tramping along the path here on the road to Halecombe, carrying the child strapped on to his pack behind—and a precious heavy weight it must have been for a man to carry on his back all day, now mustn't it, my dear?—when he saw a ship on the rocks down below, and some men coming out from Halecombe along the beach. And then—he was very near out of his mind, you'll not forget, my dearie—an evil, wicked thought came over him. He unstrapped the blessed child, and wrapped her up as warm as he could, and scrambled down the cliff-side. The men never noticed him. The night was too precious dark and wild for that. When he saw their lanterns turning back along the beach he put down the child near the water, but where the waves couldn't come to her, and he hid himself behind a rock and waited. He saw them take her up—so he told me—and then he knew that the child would be all right; and he climbed up again to the path very quiet, and turned back to Rymouth and never came near to Halecombe no more. That's what he told me years and years ago, and it's been on my blessed mind to tell ye ever since. But don't you go to jump at conclusions. For mind you, I don't say as that child was you; for that was all the blessed story as he told it to me, neither more nor less, so 'elp me truly! Only it do seem precious likely, now don't it? And if so be as it is, why, there's no call to be ashamed of young Mr. Pendarn, missy."

The pedlar relit his pipe, which had gone out, and pulled at his grizzled beard nervously, waiting for Caroline to speak.

"He is dead—this Mr. Smith?" she asked suddenly, her white face still turned towards the ground.

"Oh yes, my dear, he's dead! Years and years ago. There ain't anything to be got out of him."

The girl was fumbling with something at her neck. All at once she advanced towards the pedlar with her hand outstretched.

"This locket?" she said, almost fiercely. "This was found around my neck that night. Does this look as if it belonged to a pedlar's child?"

The old man took it from her fingers and examined it closely in the fading light.

"Well, now, to my mind it does look uncommon like it," he said at last. "That was a line of goods as was very popular about that time. Not in these parts, my dear, oh, no! not in these parts. It was too superior an article for these parts, and came too expensive; but in Exeter and such places we sold a many of them, and made a rare profit, too. Not but what it's a pretty-made thing and worth what we asked for it. But bless my soul, I call to mind as I've the blessed fellow to that locket in my pack now; and, if so be that you would like the pair——"

But without a word the girl had snatched the locket from his hand, and was running swiftly down the steep declivity of the path towards Halcombe.

The old pedlar remained sitting in the same position until his pipe was smoked through. Then he rose, knocked out the ashes of the pipe against the side-post of the stile, and readjusted the pack upon his stooping shoulders. His shaggy eye-

brows were knitted in deep thought, and he gazed intently down the slope towards the spot where Caroline Pendarn's light dress had fluttered out of sight in the gathering darkness.

"Poor girl!" he muttered to himself at last, as he took up the crooked stick and prepared to follow her footsteps down the path. "Poor girl! I'm afeard as she'll take on a bit at first. But it was just as well to tell her the truth; oh, yes! just as well. Only it wouldn't have done to let her think as it was me that left her on the beach that night. My gracious, no! She wouldn't have liked to have to think of Old Sol as her father! Not old Sol! Oh, no, not Old Sol! She wouldn't have liked that. Mr. Smith was a very superior man; she'll always remember that, and it'll be a comfort to her, poor child! And to think of her putting such a value on that bit of trumpery as I hung round her neck! Well, well!—She'll marry young Pendarn now, and he's a good lad. It was just as well to tell her the truth. But I doubt she'll bear Old Sol a grudge for lowering of her pride so sudden. It was very hard on her poor old father to have to be the one to do it, that it was! But there! I've done my duty by her now; and it's been upon my conscience these many years as perhaps I never quite did my duty by that girl—not as her father should. It's been upon my conscience somehow, it has indeed.—But she'll marry Sam Pendarn fast enough now. Oh, yes! she'll marry Sam Pendarn now."

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